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Who is Turkish American?

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Who is Turkish American?
Investigating Contemporary Discourses on Turkish Americanness

Proefschrift ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan Tilburg University op gezag van de rector magnificus, prof. dr. Ph. Eijlander, in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie in de Ruth First zaal van de Universiteit op dinsdag 9 september 2014 om 16.15 uur door Alice Leri geboren op 11 oktober 1983 te La Spezia, Italië.

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CHAPTER 1

In college I wanted to start a Turkish student association, and in my college end of the.... domestic ...well the college... well the five members...and I was the ONLY TURK. There was one other Turk, we...we were the two Turks in my... in my college. And... but he wasn't interested because, his parents have told him...my friend wasn't interested in joining because his parents have told him "don't get too involved with the association thing...you know it took forever first to come to America, very expensive here, we want you to study and become somebody", mmm....plus they had a negative experience in the 1960 coup and in the 70 coup and this is the [unclear] was anything political. My parents kind of said to me the same thing too...but, I WAS BORN AND GREW UP HERE with my famfriends...thou different years and [unclear] in high school, and to me it is silly, not to be engaged. mmm....and so...I defied my parents. Highly. Respectfully. And that's how started an association and...when I started to start my association I couldn't find, four other people, it's my Italian American friend who said to me, "it's ok Deniz (pseudonym)! We'll....be your officers in the association. So Chris Bozzo (pseudonym)... he became my vice-president, and ...James Hill, Lerry Mariotti (pseudonyms) ...and I had a girl from...Fiji American being the secretary ...mmm of the organizations... but I was the only Turk...and...That's how we started doing cultural activities in my house! The fact was that... other Turkish student associations... THIS was the meaning of America, that you shouldn't need to be a Turk, ethnically speaking, to be an officer of a Turkish organization, mmm... you have to be from Turkey! It's also, I realized much later in my life, that's also the meaning that ATATÜRK, the first president of Turkey, gave to the term "Turk", when he said after world war one and after war of independence "happy is the man who said he SAIS to be a Turk". You know, "sais" in Turkish is "diyene". And I always say in my talks to Turkish American nations why when I go to CanCanada I do the same talk. In Canada on Saturday I said he says DIYENÈ not DNA.

DNA meaning we don't have to be...REAL ethnically Turkish. Mmm...there is a nationality definition, look nationality of a country, a citizenship. We are all listed together... Turkey is that comprises all the thirty ethnic groups. Today we give so much importance to these SUBGROUPS that...we would miss the point that, we only with each other we were able to survive to World War one. And...now we are able to... have families today ...mmm...so ...mmm...the...that experience also showed me that, mmm... that Chris Bozzo could also be a Turk, you know...and I could be an Italian under a new definition...of...of our COMPLEX integrated world.

(From my interview with Deniz, ATAA's former presidents)

INTRODUCTION

This study is about the making of Turkish American identities in contemporary American society. Starting with some considerations regarding the history and the current state of Turkish American studies, this first chapter has the purpose of introducing and embedding my research in this specific field by giving a general overview on the whole project and explaining the main questions and their rationale. In the first section, besides introducing previous research in this specific area of study, I will highlight current problems in the field, explaining how transnationality (Vertovec, 1999; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton, 1995) and super-diversity (Vertovec, 2006; 2007a; 2007b) have introduced the need of new definitions and different theoretical approaches. I will then move on to present my research questions and the theoretical and methodological assumptions they are embedded in. In the same section I will also connect the different case studies this project consists of and explain the reasons that brought me to investigate Turkish Americanness in such diverse contexts and to use such heterogeneous sources for doing so. A third section will focus on the overall

value this research might have in the field of Turkish American studies, and the main reasons for this endeavor will be explained. In the final section, then, I will give a general overview on the structure of this study and summarize the main ideas and concepts behind each chapter.

Let us now examine in more detail the current state of Turkish American studies, and the kind of research that has already contributed to the development of this field.

1.2 TURKISH AMERICAN STUDIES

When I started working on this project, Turkish American studies were a relatively new field of investigation. Turkish migration to the United States has not, in fact, been given much attention in academia until recent years and it can be claimed that, except for a few articles in various international journals, the topic remained relatively unknown at least until 2008, when the first monographs on Turkish Americans were finally published. Before that year Akgün Birol (2000), with a work on the role of Turkish American migrants in promoting Turkish American relationships, Şebnem Köşer Akçapar (2006), with a study on the migration of highly skilled professionals from Turkey to America, Roberta Micallef (2004), with a paper on the heterogeneity of the Turkish American community and especially İlhan Kaya (2004; 2007; 2009), with different publications on Turkish American immigration history and identity across generations certainly contributed to drawing attention to the issue. In 2008, however, the state of Turkish American studies started to change considerably. During this year, not only did Lisa di Carlo (2008) publish a book — the first book in the area — on her study on transnational networks and regional identity among Turkish unskilled migrants living in the US, but in the last months of 2008 also Deniz Balgamiş together with Kemal Karpat — a very well-known Turkish historian in the international academic context — edited a volume on Turkish migration to the States, bringing together most of the existing information and most of the scholars working on the topic. The book gives a general historical and sociological overview on Turkish migrations from the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey to the US, and at the same time it also presents a very accurate bibliography, listing almost all the existing sources on the issue, from unpublished documents to newspaper articles, oral history tapes, websites and Master's theses or doctoral dissertations. The volume, which certainly presents a valuable contribution to the field, also thanks to the supervision of Kemal Karpat and the involvement of a credible publishing house, has had a fundamental role in justifying the existence and establishing the basis for Turkish American studies as a worthy and independent area of research. In the years prior to its publication,

investigations in this particular field were often connected to Muslim or migration studies or were relegated to minor Turkish journals such as, for instance, the studies published by Akgün (2000), Bilgé (1996) or Di Carlo (1998) clearly show.

In recent years, however, despite the apparent momentum created by the publication of *Turkish Migration to the United States* (eds. Karpāt, and Balgamiş, 2008), research in the area does not seem to have substantially increased. In fact, a survey of recent publications in the field shows that, with the exception of a volume on the mainstream discourses circulating about Turks in the US by Justin McCarthy (2010), Turkish American studies have remained a relatively uninvestigated area of research. In this context, events and initiatives such as a workshop on Turkish American studies organized by the Kadir Has University (Turkey) for June 2014 will probably have a fundamental role in evaluating the state of the research in the area and perhaps in eventually establishing a new basis, new boundaries and new questions for the field. The use of labels such as “Turkish American” in an increasingly complex and transnational world has become more and more challenging and necessarily needs further elaboration. In fact, Turkish American studies today should necessarily go beyond the borders established by Karpāt (2008), as new relevant phenomena are challenging any previous definitions of Turkish Americanness. Turkish Americans cannot be considered anymore simply as “[...] permanent settlers who see their own future and that of their children as intrinsically tied to the fate of the United States” (Karpāt, 2008: 184). The emergence of new transnational identities transcending the borders of national, cultural, social and ethnic belonging is modifying to a great extent the Turkish panorama in the United States, increasing also the overall complexity of the context to completely new levels.

In contrast to the situation within Turkish American studies, recently, probably also as a consequence of huge research funding campaigns directed by Turkish Americans themselves, it is possible to count an incredible number of publications by well-established scholars in the field of Islamic and Turkish studies such as, for instance, Yavuz and Esposito (2003) and Yavuz (2013) about the emergence and the impact on the American and European societies of the Gülen or Hamza movement, an Islamic organization that apparently is very actively promoting tolerance and understanding among religions¹. Despite the visibility of this issue in

¹ The Gülen or Hamza movement is a very controversial organization. Its leader, Fethullah Gülen, officially migrated to the US for medical reasons but according to rumors he left Turkey before he could be incriminated for favoring/planning the establishment of an Islamic State. Also his actual views are often regarded as diverging from the tolerance and the peaceful image of himself and of his followers that he has constructed especially in

other fields, as well as its relevance, it has been completely ignored by Turkish American studies. Not only is the leader of the group a Turkish imam living in Pennsylvania, but Gülen and his approach to interfaith dialogue are also quite well known in the US — as well as in Europe — as a specific form of Islam of Turkish origin. Esposito and Yavuz extensively discuss the issue already in 2003 in their edited volume *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, but curiously neither among the studies of this volume, nor in other studies by scholars in Turkish American or Islamic studies, is the phenomenon ever connected to the emergence of new discourses about transnational Turkish American identities. Nevertheless, the influence of the group in making and sharing Islamic Turkish American identities and in shaping people's imagination about Muslims and Turks within the American context is quite evident, manifesting itself in numerous initiatives, interfaith activities and educational businesses run by the movement (See Chapter 4).

At the moment there is a huge need to expand the area of Turkish American studies, to re-discuss its scope and connect the field to new transnational phenomena — such as that of the Hamza movement — and to recent theories concerning identity, transnationality and super-diversity². Such re-thinking is fundamental for the survival and the credibility of the field itself in the contemporary academic context. The approach assumed in Turkish American studies in recent years has not really taken into account these issues, focusing instead on an a priori definition of Turkish Americans that completely ignores the discourses circulating in society about Turkish Americanness and belonging. Thus, the overall aim of this study is to introduce a new perspective on Turkish American studies by expanding the field to more recent phenomena such as for instance the one of Turkish Islam, and by investigating the making of Turkish American identities through the analysis of contemporary, public as well as private, discourses emerging from the exploration of media sources, interviews as well as literary artifacts.

1.3 WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

On the basis of the previous considerations regarding the necessity of redefining the scope of Turkish American studies, this research mainly aims at re-discussing Turkish American

Europe and the US. A detailed report about this can be found in Popp (2012). The topic will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

² Super-diversity refers to the diversification of diversity. It can be considered a level of complexity never experienced before (see Chapter 2).

identities by focusing on meaning-making strategies in contemporary American society. Hence, this study addresses the following broad question:

What are the discourses through which Turkish American identities are built in contemporary American society?

The theoretical and methodological framework of the study will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3, but in what follows I will already briefly explain the fundamental premises of the project.

My research question, drawing on the work of Stuart Hall (1991; 1993a; 1993b; 1997a; 2002), Paul Du Gay, Stuart Hall et al. (1997), and Jan Blommaert (2005), is based on the fundamental assumption that identities are multi-voiced discursive practices constantly constructed through various semiotic means such as, for instance, practices of production, consumption and regulation and representations (see Chapter 3). From this starting point, my study assumes, then, that the discourses circulating in society at a certain point in time and space contribute to the formation of identity repertoires that are subject to constant change. The meanings attached to Turkish Americanness today are without any doubt different from the ones of the past, and being constantly under transformation, it is impossible to establish an absolute demarcation line for Turkish Americanness frozen in time. Identities, as everything that is historical, have a temporal dimension. They are constantly subjected to the changes of time and power relations and can only be conceived as something in process of formation, always elusive and incomplete; therefore never fully graspable or definable if not in relation to the specific position they — and their observer — occupy at that specific moment. In this regard the concept of “positionality” introduced by Hall (1991) is particularly relevant for this study. The exact place that a certain discourse occupies in relation to other discourses through time and space can be regarded as fundamental for understanding and framing the differences among various ways of defining a specific identity. For instance, in Chapter 4 we will see that Turkish Americanness is given very different meanings by the various associations representing secular and conservative Turkish Americans in the US.

On the basis of the above considerations, taking into account the multivoicedness of identity discourses, in this study I decided to explore the making of Turkish Americanness in the contemporary *conjuncture*³ through the analysis of semiotic practices produced by different

³ In this study the term “conjuncture” is used to refer to the result of the interplay of interrelated but different social, economic, political and ideological conditions (see Hall, 1979) within which Turkish Americanness is

social actors. Hence, in this study I will approach my research question from various perspectives, focusing in each chapter on different contexts and discourses about Turkish American identity. The study makes use of discourse analysis as its main tool of investigation and, as I will explain in more detail below, is divided into three main sections based on the analysis of three different semiotic sources, introducing at various levels in society discourses about Turkish Americanness. The first focus of the study (Chapter 4) will be on the identity strategies produced and publicly shared by dominant groups within the Turkish American landscape on their webpages. In Chapter 5, I will explore the discourses produced by the members of one of those groups during interviews I carried out in early 2012 in Washington D.C.. In the chapter I will highlight the gap existing between the way identities are defined in the public space and the way individuals try to make sense of their own identities by adapting their experiences to repertoires they are familiar with. In the final case study (Chapter 6), then, I will go back again to the public sphere but this time, rather than focusing on the way Turkish Americanness is constructed by dominant groups, I will explore the construction of Turkish American identities through a series of public — but at the same time individual — discourses issued within literary artifacts.

As my aim is to analyze and problematize the Turkish American experience, not only did I try to select quite diverse discourses in terms of contents, but I also tried to explore Turkish Americanness from different perspectives, focusing on sources which today contribute to the making of what might be considered normative Turkish American identities (Chapters 4 and 6) as well as on individual discourses, which actually draw a clear image of the high level of complexity currently existing within the Turkish American context (Chapter 5).

While selecting the specific contexts and data to be used in this study, I have decided to mainly analyze semiotic materials produced by people who defined themselves, were defined by others or can be considered from a normative perspective (i.e. in this case mainly citizenship or family heritage) Turkish Americans. An exception to this, in a certain way, can be considered the study focusing on literature. As I will explain in more detail in Chapter 6, literary artifacts cannot be considered to be the reflection of the specific identity an author is attributed (or attributes herself), but rather literature consists of multiple and interacting

built, shared and performed. The term “conjuncture”, therefore, does not simply refer to the “context” within which my analysis of Turkish American identities is positioned but, rather, paraphrasing Grossberg (2006: 4-6), it should be understood as an articulation, accumulation and condensation of multiple, temporally and spatially variable contexts which, overlapping and interacting, participate at different levels to the making of contemporary Turkish American identities.

voices which eventually might come from considerably different backgrounds (see Bakhtin, 1981). Certainly, it might have been valuable to investigate also discourses about Turkish Americanness issued by different groups or individuals identifying with other categories (e.g. Armenians, Turks, Americans, Turkic Americans, etc.) but this, for the moment, would be quite challenging. The group, as I will explain in Chapter 2, is quite small — about 500.000 people including illegals⁴ — and only in recent years it has started to be slightly more visible in American society but still no visible discourses have been developed about Turkish Americans by others.

As I explained above, scholars operating within the field often abuse the term “Turkish American”, imposing on it a priori meanings that do not really take into account the complexity of the Turkish American experience. In this respect, a study investigating the making of Turkish American identities through different semiotic practices will offer an insight into the multiple meanings that the label might acquire and the many identity repertoires circulating in society about Turkish Americanness. Reflecting on different identity discourses, this research, moreover, will highlight how super-diversity (see Chapter 2) works within the Turkish American context, hopefully opening the way to more challenging reflections on the current Turkish American “situation”. A study like this may also be valuable not only for the field of Turkish American studies but also from a more general perspective: It brings together ethnography and literary studies, and shows the relevance of an interdisciplinary approach in understanding social phenomena. Furthermore, analyses of literary artifacts serve to illustrate how people in general and researchers in particular might learn something about society from aesthetic texts.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

After this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2 I will outline the general framework of this study and, through a review of the existing literature in the field, I will draw a general picture of Turkish migrations to the US starting from the last years of the Ottoman Empire and arriving to the contemporary situation. In the same section I will also discuss the use of the label “Turkish American” in the past as well as in the current conjuncture, and give some practical examples about the different ways its borders have been defined in various academic and non-academic contexts. Drawing on Vertovec (2006; 2007a; 2007b) then, I will claim that the

⁴ According to different estimates, it has been calculated that the total number of Turks in the US oscillates between 200.000 according to some (Saatçi, 2008) and 350.000 - 500.000 according to others (Kaya, 2009).

Turkish American framework today, as a consequence of its extreme complexity, should necessarily be regarded as super-diverse and therefore, in the light of recent developments such as transnationalism, the overlapping of different generations of migrants and the diffusion of new technologies, I will argue for the need of new, context-sensitive ways of looking at and defining this label instead of a priori assumptions.

In Chapter 3 I will return in more detail to the fundamental assumptions at the basis of the whole project and introduce the theoretical and methodological framework I have decided to use for my study. Drawing on the identity theories developed by Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay and Jan Blommaert, I will focus on the definition of concepts such as identity, identification and identity repertoires that can be considered particularly relevant for an understanding of the case studies I will present in the following chapters. In the same section I will also explain my overall methodological choices (more specific methodological issues relevant for each case study will be discussed chapter by chapter) and motivate my decision of using discourse analysis as a research tool for investigating Turkish American identities.

The three following chapters, Chapter 4, 5 and 6, are the central core of this book, presenting my analysis of Turkish American identities and Turkish American repertoires by identifying various discourses circulating in American society. Specifically in Chapter 4, starting from a localized *Google* search⁵, I will argue that the most visible websites about Turkish Americans belong to influential heritage associations representing the interests of power lobbies acting in America as well as in Turkey. The struggle between the secularists and the religious conservatives⁶, in fact, seems to be visible also in the Turkish American web-context. In the chapter, I will analyze identity discourses produced and shared by two representative associations — namely ATAA (*The Assembly of Turkish American Associations*) and TAI (*The Turkish American Islamic Institute*) — through their websites. Banners, logos as well as texts will be considered in this study as particularly relevant sources for analyzing the making of Turkish American identities on these websites. In Chapter 5, on the other hand, I will move from the discourses created by dominant groups about Turkish Americanness to the ones appropriated by the people behind one of these associations. In this chapter, on the basis of the fieldwork I carried out in Washington D.C. in January 2012, I will analyze the discourses

⁵ This is a function of the add-on *Google Global*. For more details see Chapter 4.

⁶ It should be observed that this work mainly took shape before the fracture between the AKP (*Justice and Development Party*) and the Gülenists. Today it would be interesting to investigate the impact of this event on the Turkish American situation.

produced by individuals belonging to ATAA about their identification as Turkish Americans and their personal adaptation of the label according to their own experiences. Chapter 5 will reveal a situation that is much more complex than the one depicted by the two associations and in some cases will highlight the fragility of ATAA's construction of Turkish-Americanness. Chapter 6, then, will return to the public sphere to investigate identity discourses circulating in society about Turkish Americanness that might potentially be alternative to the ones put forward by dominant groups (Chapter 4). For this purpose, I will focus on the literary production of 'Turkish American' and transnational authors whose artifacts are relevant in introducing specific discourses and repertoires about Turkish Americanness in society.

Finally, in the last chapter I will outline the conclusions of my study, firstly summarizing the discourses and the repertoires about Turkish Americanness emerging from my research. Secondly, I will discuss the implications and significance of the results of the study and conclude by making some considerations about the limitation of the approach I used, as well as suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER 2

RE-CONTEXTUALIZING TURKISH MIGRATION TO THE US

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before further discussing my data and theoretical and overall methodological framework, I will briefly introduce the general historical and social framework within which the contemporary Turkish American experience should be placed. In the following pages, thus, I will first give an overview on the general history of Turkish migration to North America, starting from the end of the 19th century until today. Different studies, as I will explain in more detail below, have highlighted a very significant divergence between the overall situation of Turkish migrants in the US and in Europe (on the Turkish situation in Europe see for instance Abadan-Unat, 1995; Yalçın-Hackmann, 1997; Martin, 1991). In a second section, then, I will focus on different definitions of Turkish Americanness, discussing the main issues they raise in view of the overall complexity of the current situation. In the last section, I will introduce the concept of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2006; 2007a; 2007b; Blommaert and Varis, 2011), linking it to the Turkish American case.

2.2 TURKISH MIGRATION TO THE US

While the massive migration of Turkish guest workers to Europe in the 1970s, especially to Germany and the Netherlands, has attracted the interest of many sociologists, linguists and migration literature scholars (for instance Adelson, 2002; Backus, 1992; Extra, and Verhoeven, 1993; Extra, and Yağmur, 2010; Horrocks, and Kolinsky, 1996; Mandel, 1990; Pfaff, 1993; Verkuyten, and Yıldız, 2007; Yağmur, and van de Vijver, 2012; Yeğenoğlu, 2005), Turkish migration to the US has been almost ignored. In fact, Turkish migration to America, as I anticipated in the previous chapter, has not been given much attention in academia until very recent years (most studies on Turks living in the US or Turkish Americans have been conducted within the last ten years), when the phenomenon started to capture the attention of a number of Turkish, American and European scholars. The situation that emerges from their writings, however, is of great interest, especially in view of its deviation from the

standard European picture. In fact, Turkish emigration to the US has been really low compared to that to Europe. Moreover, it has been characterized by the migration of a majority of intellectuals and professionals, unlike in the case of the emigration of Turks to Germany or the Netherlands. The aim of this section is to trace a general history of Turkish migration to the US so as to give the reader a first glance into the matter. In doing so I will mostly use data coming from the existing literature on the topic, highlighting the incongruities and dissimilarities that can be found across different studies and estimates testifying to the complexity of the case. But let us start from the very beginning, that is to say: Since when is it possible to talk about “Turkish” migration to the US? Of course the answer is not easy, especially if we consider the issues that might arise from the use of the term “Turk”; any reference to “Turks” is actually quite problematic before the foundation of the Turkish Nation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. According to Karpāt (2008), Turkish immigration to North America began in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, when about 400.000 Ottoman citizens moved from the “Near Orient” to North America in search of a better life. As prior to 1903, the ethnic group of the newcomers was not registered by the American authorities (Grabowski, 2008; Ipek, and Çağlayan, 2008) and as after that year many “Turks” declared to be Greek or Armenian in order to ease the entry process (Karpāt, 2008), it has not been possible to calculate the exact number of Turks who migrated to the US during this first migration wave. It has been estimated that about 10% of the total number of migrants coming from the Empire had “Turkish” origins, while the remaining part were more probably Armenians, Greeks or Christians⁷ escaping from the Ottoman persecutions (Akçapar, 2006).

According to Ipek and Çağlayan (2008), it seems that the Turkish migrants belonging to the first wave mostly moved to the big cities of the North East. After the Act of Literacy⁸ (1917) and the Johnson Reed Quota Act⁹ (1924), the Ottoman and Turkish migration to the US almost stopped for more than 25 years, and there is not much information available about this period. The two laws, banning illiterates and limiting the annual number of migrants from Turkey to a maximum of 100 respectively, allowed entrance into the United States only to a small number of Turks (Halman, 1980) that can be said to have very probably coincided, at

⁷ Akçapar does not include Christians among Turks and seems to use the definition of Turks given by Halman (1980), according to which the term designates a citizen of the Ottoman Empire or of the Turkish Republic who speaks Turkish and who is Muslim or comes from a Muslim family. The number of Christian Turks at the time was extremely low despite the missionary activities in the Empire.

⁸ The Act of Literacy restricted the immigration of illiterates to the US.

⁹ The Johnson Reed Quota Act imposed an annual limit to the number of migrants coming from any country, establishing this limit to 2% of the total number of migrants from that country living in the US in 1890.

the beginning at least, with the migration of wealthier Turks¹⁰. The level of literacy among Turks — especially if understood as literacy in a foreign alphabet — considerably increased also among the lower classes only after the language and alphabet reforms carried out by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at the end of the 1920s. Prior to that, education was generally a privilege of the wealthier families and the elites of the Empire. Despite the reforms carried out in the field of language and literacy in the first years of the Republic, during the 1930s the total number of Turks living in America did not increase but, on the contrary, the restrictive policies of the American government combined with the return of a huge percentage of migrants to Turkey caused a notable reduction in their number. It has been calculated, in fact, that between 1899 and 1924, 86% of the Turks living in the US went back to Turkey. The number of migrants resettling in Turkey, furthermore, remained significantly high also throughout the 1920s, mainly as a consequence of the return policies promoted by Atatürk after the foundation of the Republic in 1923 (Halman, 1980).

As I mentioned above, there is not much information about the period from the 1920s until the end of the Second World War. Most scholars, however, agree on locating the second migratory wave of Turks to North America in the years between the end of the 1950s and the 1970s, when a considerable number of highly skilled professionals moved from Anatolia to the new world in search of better job opportunities and higher salaries. Mainly moving for occupational reasons, most of these highly-skilled migrants unexpectedly ended up settling on a permanent basis in the US. Considering that this “brain drain” phenomenon (Tansel, and Güngör, 2003) did not involve more than 15.000 people dispersed and scattered across different American states, it is not really possible to talk about the formation of a solid and visible Turkish community (while this of course depends on one’s definition of community) during this period; moreover, as a consequence of their moderate religiosity and of their social success, this group of highly educated migrants quickly assimilated into the hosting society, making the Turkish presence in the States almost invisible. The Turkish American associations born in this period according to some, seem to have been founded more for

¹⁰ The case of Selma Ekrem (Istanbul, 1902 - Massachusetts, 1986) can be considered as representative here. She was a writer, intellectual and diplomat who migrated to the United States in 1924. The daughter of a prominent Turkish family, during her childhood she was educated according to the fashion of the time and therefore had a good command of Turkish, Ottoman, French and English. In the US she lectured on the situation of Turkish women and on the new Turkish Republic while later on she became the Turkish consul of New York. Aside from her political and social activity she also published quite a famous collection of youth memoirs titled *Unveiled: autobiography of a Turkish Woman* (1931) followed by an essay about the situation of Turkey at that time (1947) and an anthology of Turkish fairy tales (1964).

attesting to the existence of a Turkish minority in the US rather than for sharing common identity feelings¹¹ (Karpas, 2008). I would however be careful making such a claim.

The migration of highly professional people increased until the 80s, when the third migratory wave started to bring new categories of migrants such as students, shop keepers and a number of illegal unskilled workers into the US. While it should not be overlooked that this deep change was in part the consequence of the investments of Turkish businessmen who preferred importing cheap labor to Northern America from Turkey (Akçapar, 2006), it is of course also true that the tightening of the European immigration rules in that period contributed in a considerable way to the illegal migration of Turkish citizens to the US; it seems in fact that less control would have encouraged non-regular workers to move to the US where, according to Di Carlo (2008), it would be easier to live illegally. Besides the increasing number of unspecialized workers, according to Akçapar's data (2006), the number of young Turkish professionals either moving to the US or remaining there after having completed their education, has remained quite high even if some of them are now less likely to permanently settle in the US. On the basis of the data provided by the US Census Bureau in 2008, of the 119,670 Turks over 25 years old dwelling in the US (citizens, legal residents, illegal migrants and long-term visitors¹²), 23% had a bachelor's degree (17.5% national average) while 25.7% had a graduate or professional degree (10.2% national average). Thus, even if the number of professionals has decreased in recent decades, Turkish migration to the US, just taking into account permanent or long-term residents and American citizens, can still be considered a highly skilled migration, even if the number of experts moving to North

¹¹ According to Karpas (2008), due to the dispersion of highly skilled migrants across the US, it is not possible to refer to "Turkish American identities" or to "true communities identified with Turkishness" until recent years (177). Even though the first Turkish American associations were founded in the 1950s, in fact, FTA (*Federation of Turkish Associations*) and ATA (*Assembly of Turkish Associations*) according to the scholar were mainly professional rather than heritage organizations. Curiously enough, Karpas (2008) does not use the full acronyms of the organizations (FTAA and ATAA), cutting out "American". I found no evidence elsewhere for the use of these shorter acronyms. Still according to Karpas (2008), with the third migration wave from Turkey to the US the situation radically changed and the arrival of unskilled workers who started settling in nearby areas together with the revival of Islam seems to have encouraged the formation of Turkish American communities. Quite a similar position is also shared by Pultar (2005) who, however, still denies the existence of Turkish American communities and identities.

¹² The data was collected among current residents living more than two consecutive months in a housing unit or de facto residents of a Group Quarters. The United States Census Bureau defines "Group Quarters" as follows: "Group Quarters (GQ) are places where people live or stay, in a group living arrangement, which is owned or managed by an entity or organization providing housing and/or services for the residents. This is not a typical household-type living arrangement. These services may include custodial or medical care as well as other types of assistance, and residency is commonly restricted to those receiving these services. People living in group quarters are usually not related to each other. Group quarters include such places as college residence halls, residential treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, group homes, military barracks, correctional facilities,

America from Turkey is not as high as it was before. On the other hand, however, it is also true that the picture would probably seem very different with a change in the parameters according to which the total number of “Turks” living in the US is calculated. How to estimate the number of third or fourth generation migrants who did not define themselves as “ethnically Turkish” in the questionnaire provided by the census? The debate on the total number of Turks actually living in the US is still open and it is clear that the issue is far from being solved as it mostly depends on the specific meaning scholars and people in general attribute to the label “Turk”, “American” and “permanent” or “long-term settler”. Therefore it should not be surprising to see that, according to different estimates, it has been calculated that the total number of Turks in the US oscillates between 200.000 according to some (Saatçi, 2008) and 350.000-500.000¹³ according to others (Kaya, 2009).

Looking at the general picture, it is clear that the Turkish presence in the States started to become numerically relevant only in the 1980s, when a greater number of migrants from Turkey moved to America as a consequence of the “restrictions and the limited employment opportunities” in Western Europe (Karpas, 2008: 179). In the same years, furthermore, Karpas also observes that a group of entrepreneurs from Turkey started investing in small and medium businesses in the US while often employing people from their home country. The economic liberalization policies carried out by Turgut Özal after the coup of September 1980 also seem to have influenced the characteristics and the numbers of Turkish migration to America to a significant degree. Saatçi (2008) notes, in fact, that, since the beginning of the 80s, Turkish immigration has notably increased, involving not only the social and cultural elites but basically all social categories. Despite the fact that the Turkish presence in the US can be traced back to the end of the 19th century¹⁴, considering the small number of people involved in the first two migration waves, today it can certainly be claimed that Turkish Americans can be considered quite a recent presence in the United States, especially if we compare their story and their numbers to the ones, for instance, of the Italian or the Irish migrations. This, however, seems to have not prevented them from building, in only a few

and workers’ dormitories” (“Can you tell me more about group quarters (GQ) or group housing facilities in the American Community Survey”).

¹³ According to different estimates, there are between 1.500.000 and 3.500.000 Turkish migrants living in Germany (see for instance Kılıçlı, 2003).

¹⁴ Some scholars maintain that Turkish presence in the US actually traces back to an earlier past. They claim, in fact, that the *Melungeons*, a term generally used since the late 17th century in order to classify “a mixed ethnic group” of free black people living in the Southeastern part of America, partially had Turkish origins. I am quite skeptical, however, about the validity of such a hypothesis as some of the arguments presented are certainly debatable, such as the fact that the name of the famous waterfall Niagara would have Turkish origins from the words “Ne” and “Yaygara” meaning “what a huge noise” (see Ertan, 2002).

decades, a dense network of laic and religious associations promoting Turkish and Turkish American culture (Karpas, 2008; Micallef, 2004) — both online and “offline” — through festivals, educational centers, newspapers, online TV programs and forums but also through interfaith centers, mosques and charter schools¹⁵. The Turkish presence in the US and its importance for the growth of the state, moreover, was made official in 1984, regardless of the protests of Armenian Americans and Greek Americans, by the institution of a Turkish day in New York — the 21st of April — during which the arrival of the Turks and their settlement on the American soil is publicly celebrated (Heller Anderson, and Bird, 1984)¹⁶.

2.3 WHO IS ‘TURKISH AMERICAN’?

Nowadays defining who Turkish Americans actually are is a challenging task which raises a number of questions. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, it was not any easier, as this labeling — but perhaps any label — has been problematic since the first time the American immigration office considered making Turks eligible for citizenship. According to the 1870 Naturalization Act, only white or black people were allowed to become American while all Asians were automatically excluded: a decision that put Turks and Middle Eastern people in general in an ambiguous position. At the time, all Ottoman citizens, including Arabs, were listed as “Turks” regardless of their ethnic identity, and as such were automatically considered ineligible for naturalization since the Ottoman dynasty had central Asiatic origins. In 1909, a big debate on the eventuality of allowing Turks to access to citizenship was carried out in the most important newspapers — e.g. *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Herald* — as a consequence of the so-called Shishim (or Shesheim depending on the transcription) case. Shishim, a Syrian Lebanese, appealed to the Supreme Court after his application for naturalization had been refused by the immigration office (“Claim Turks”; “Is the Turk”; “Says Syrians”). The Circuit Court in Cincinnati decided in favor of Shishim but the decision was limited to Syrians and even in that case it did not mark a turning point for the Arabs who felt

¹⁵ Charter Schools in the US are primary and secondary schools which are partially funded by public money and therefore should respect some of the rules that also apply to public schools. Since the end of the 1990s, about 120 schools — I will return to this again in Chapter 4 — inspired by the teachings of Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish religious leader currently living in Pennsylvania, have been founded. Since the schools are funded by public resources however, religious education is not formally a part of the teaching programs (for more information about the Gülen-inspired Schools network, their programs and their aims, see Agai, 2003; Michel, 2003; Özdalga, 2003).

¹⁶ The *Federation of Turkish American Associations* (FTAA) initially sought to celebrate the Turkish American day on April 23rd, the day of the Turkish Independence and “The Children’s Day”. Due to Armenian protesters who claimed that it would have been disrespectful to celebrate the Turkish American day at one day of distance from the commemoration of the Armenian victims under the Ottoman empire (on April 24th), the Turkish American day has been established on April 21st (Howe, 1984).

insecure about their status as “white” until the 1940s, despite the fact that their eligibility for naturalization had been ratified in 1917 (Kayyali, 2006: 52). Meanwhile Turks, who were considered genetically descending from the “yellow” Mongolians, but who were at the same time regarded as Muslim polygamists — at least until Atatürk forbade polygamy in 1926 — remained ineligible for American citizenship until the end of the Second World War, when the ban on naturalization was lifted by the *McCarran Walter Act* (1952). Thus, in a way, it is possible to refer to “Turkish Americans” only after the 1950s if we consider nationality a fundamental prerequisite in the definition.

The difficulties in defining Turkish Americans are not, however, only the result of the long process of juridical naturalization that Turks went through in the US, but also of the specific characteristics of Turkish migration to the US and of the complexity characterizing the term “Turk”. The use of a label such as “Turkish American” in fact still raises a number of perplexities as regards the people who could eventually self-identify or be identified with it. As I mentioned above, the Turkish presence in North America has become significant only in the last forty years and the wide majority of Turkish migrants are first-generation Turks who, by 2008, had on average stayed in the US for just 15 years (Saatçi, 2008). Thus, it is obvious that, among a group of migrants mostly composed of newcomers, it can be particularly challenging to define the difference between a “Turk” and a “Turkish American”.

The debate concerning the criteria for defining Turkish American identity is also not solely an academic concern; a glance at the information available on the Web clearly illustrates that this has become an issue of public attention as well. Let us consider the case of Wikipedia, for instance. Wikipedia, together with Google, are probably the places where most people go when they are looking for general information about something. A place, a disease, a historical event, a TV series, the chemical composition of a specific substance: information on anything imaginable can be found online. At the very early stages of my study, I also did a Google search with the term “Turkish Americans”. I was “feeling lucky”¹⁷, and the search engine sent me directly to Wikipedia. The article on Turkish Americans appearing on the English version of this open-source encyclopedia categorically stated that everyone of Turkish descent with American citizenship should be considered Turkish American (“Turkish Americans”). Of course, while this cannot be taken as a scientific definition of the term, it can be analyzed as a piece of discourse about belonging and membership into American society. Here, all the Turks

¹⁷ Google has a search button named “I’m feeling lucky” that redirects the user to the first webpage of the results list.

who were not willing to renounce their Turkish citizenship¹⁸, for instance, or who did not (or do not yet) qualify for naturalization are automatically excluded from the possibility of being part of America¹⁹; the label is clearly defined only according to national citizenship. But the incorporation of migrants into a country in the contemporary conjuncture can hardly be defined only in terms of national citizenship; such an understanding can rather be seen as the direct result of assimilationist approaches (Castles, 2002). Today, membership in a nation assumes different configurations according to the particular politics of the nation itself, and, in the case of migrants, is also influenced by their ethnic and social background (Levitt, and Schiller, 2004). Furthermore, rights and privileges that would normally be accorded only to legal citizens today are often claimed or accorded also to non-official members of the community, making the boundary between inclusion and exclusion less clear. In some cases, in fact, migrants — even if they are not official citizens of a nation — may benefit from public services and social programs, actively protest against political decisions and, as in the case of the US or France, for instance, decide to fight, and eventually die, for their hosting country²⁰(Levitt, and Schiller, 2004).

In the contemporary conjuncture, inclusion is an adaptable concept that may take different shades and forms according to the perspectives we adopt to observe it. It is precisely at this point that the case of Wikipedia becomes particularly meaningful. If we shift to the Turkish version of the entry on Turkish Americans, the definition is quite different as becomes clear already from the opening sentence of the article: “Americans of Turkish Origins are people of Turkish roots who live in the US, were born in the US or that have migrated to the US (my translation)²¹. Without having to go any further, it is clear that in this case we witness a completely different definition of Turkish Americans. Here, the label expands beyond national citizenship, embracing a larger number of people and changing the requisites for being considered American. But who is really and authentically Turkish American then?

¹⁸ Akçapar (2006) highlights how, before the Turkish Parliament approved dual citizenship, the fear of losing Turkish nationality has prevented a number of migrants from acquiring American nationality.

¹⁹ In the US, all migrants with a permanent residence permit for at least five years and who have also passed a preliminary test qualify for naturalization. The permanent residence permit can be obtained through marriage, relatives, asylum or employment. A working visa however does not always allow the migrant to apply for a permanent residence permit.

According to Saatçi (2008), by 2000 only 35,025 out of a total number of 78,380 Turks were naturalized US citizens.

²⁰ It is not necessary to be a citizen of the United States of America to join their army. The same is also true for the French *Légion étrangère*.

²¹ “Türk asıllı ABD'liler, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde yaşayan, ABD içinde doğmuş veya ABD'ye göç etmiş Türk kökenli kişilerdir.”. (“Türk asıllı ABD'liler”)

As I have illustrated, the recent character of Turkish migration to the US, the impossibility of establishing a clear distinction between temporary and permanent settlers (Akçapar, 2006) and the ambiguities underlying the label “Turk”, as well as the ones beneath the term “American”, have made the definition of “Turkish Americans” as a general category very complex, especially considering the emergence of many different, but often overlapping, labels through which Turks living in the US have been referred to in the last decades. “Turks of America”, “American Turks”, “Turkish Americans” and “Americans of Turkish descent” are just some of the various terms which have been used both by the Turkish American community as well as in academia. Whatever the label, arriving at a definition of the criteria regulating inclusion in or exclusion from a certain community or group remains a challenging task and, in the case of Turkish Americans, it has become clear in our discussion so far that the way the Turkish historian Kemal Karpāt (2008) defined the “American Turks” would hardly apply to the current conjuncture. American Turks²² he writes,

[...] designates *permanent settlers who see their own future and that of their children as intrinsically tied to the fate of the United States*. This most typical understanding of Americanization does not necessitate the immigrants’ rejection of *Turkish identity, culture, or faith*. On the contrary, their Turkish and their new American identities rearrange themselves so that the *Turkish identity acquires a cultural and religious dimension* and the *American identity becomes civic and political* as the process of Americanization duplicates the situation in the late Ottoman Empire. There, one became an Ottoman citizen and spoke Turkish but retained his/her *native culture, faith, and language*. Millions of Bulgarians, Circassians, Georgians, and Bosnians thus became “Turkish”, although they were first “Ottoman”. There is no reason, therefore, why they could not much the same ways become bona fide Americans. [...] *Turkish identity is about to gain an American dimension while preserving much of its old cultural essence*. (Karpāt, 2008: 194. My emphasis).

Karpāt probably tried to circumscribe the object of his study by restricting membership to a small and apparently more “tangible” group of people but his definition is problematic for different reasons. Intentionality — or one’s plans to stay in a country — of course might play an important role in determining belonging and inclusion of migrants into a society, but what does this mean for the other migrants then? If the “will to stay” is taken as the fundamental feature Turks must possess to become “American”, how should we see those Turks who actually participate, even if to different degrees and with different modalities, in the American

²² Karpāt (2008) does not make any distinction between American Turks and Turkish Americans but uses the expressions interchangeably.

society without having specific plans? Not to mention that some of the Turks who go to the US thinking that they would go back “home”, often end up living in the US for the rest of their lives as Karpas himself points out. In the same article he, in fact, clearly states that only a small number of the ones willing to return to Turkey will actually move away from North America (2008: 184-5). Looking at this definition it is also quite difficult to determine what Karpas exactly means using labels such as: “Turkish culture”, “faith” and “essence” or “American political and civic identity”. Despite an initial explanation Karpas, in fact, does not problematize the issue enough, writing as if it would be possible to look at Turkishness or Americanness as uniform and unproblematic categories. What about, for instance, the ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities (i.e. Kurds, Armenians, Jews, Syrians, Russians, Alevi, Christians) of Turkey? Should those people be considered Turks as well? And, eventually, might they be considered Turkish Americans? Or should they be considered, for instance, “Turkish Armenian American”? Not to mention the American citizens of Turkish origin who went back to live in Turkey after having spent their childhoods in the US, as is the case, for instance, with Furkan Doğan, the Turkish American (as he has been defined by many American as well Turkish newspapers, blogs and websites²³) 19-year-old boy who was killed in the Gaza flotilla raid on 31 May, 2010. Very similar observations, furthermore, can also be made for what Karpas refers to as “American civic and political identity”.

2.4 TRANSNATIONALISM, SUPER-DIVERSITY AND THE TURKISH AMERICAN CASE

The changing migration patterns, deterritorialization of the nation-state and of citizenship, the development of new media and telecommunication systems added to the presence of “overlapping communities based on date of arrival” (Micallef, 2004: 233) have made the definition of Turkish American community hardly graspable as is clear from the section above. In the current conjuncture, however, this is not surprising, as similar issues are on the agenda of all studies and disciplines dealing with social realities at large. Concepts such as “belonging”, “community”, “membership” and therefore “cultural identity” are becoming extremely difficult to define and need to be rethought in the light of the new ways ideas, goods and people are circulating today (Castles, 2002; Vertovec, 2007b).

The Internet in general, social networks, e-shops, low cost travels, and cheap telephone calls are all among the phenomena that have contributed to the fundamental changes in the way

²³ See for instance Magee (2010); Özerkan (2011); “American Victim Furkan”.

migrants live their lives. Online, it is possible to find local newspapers, to participate in discussion forums, chat with far-away friends, watch the national TV or order the latest bestseller in one's home country, as well as ethnic food. Migrants find themselves in a situation that is completely different from the one 30 years ago, as the possibilities of having contact with one's homeland have increased. Migrants are no longer uprooted from their past, but have mostly become transnational: bounded while at the same time transcending the borders of two or more countries (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton, 1995).

Transnationality is a concept that started to be applied in the 1990s, and it offers a fruitful way of looking at the membership issue I have described above, representing an alternative to the traditional assimilation-rejection pattern of in/exclusion. Transnationalism, however, as Balibar (2006) claims, should not be regarded in terms of a disappearance of political national identities, but rather this phenomenon deals with their "relativization" as these, today, "must compete and take into account other kinds of identities, interests, and norms which, seen from a national point of view, escape sovereignty and cross boundaries" (10). From this perspective, considering Turkish Americans as a transnational community, certainly, gives the possibility to take into account the totality of the people living across the borders of Turkey and of the United States, disregarding their different degrees of incorporation and membership into these two countries. Therefore, it is possible to group under the same name transnational corporate expatriates as well as many economic migrants, undocumented workers, students²⁴ but also second-generation migrants, making the use of the label Turkish American less problematic.

On the other hand, considering Turkish migration to the US uniquely as a transnational phenomenon would be misleading, as it would be to consider as Turkish Americans only the migrants who have become legal citizens of the United States of America. The label transnational, in fact, even if perfectly appropriate in the situation of large numbers of migrants in the present conjuncture, cannot be used to describe the totality of people who have moved abroad in the last 50-60 years. In the specific case of Turkish migration to America for example, the term transnational would be inadequate to include all those Turks who have moved to the US during what has been called the second migration wave (1950-1970). Those people in fact did not have the same possibilities of developing transnational

²⁴ Classification of migrant categories from Braziel (2008).

networks as migrants have had for the last 20 years, and their migration experiences have been considerably different compared to the more recent ones.

Who are Turkish Americans then? Obviously it is not possible to give a clear answer. There is no one who essentially and authentically is Turkish American. I would rather say that there are Turkish AmericanS and that inclusion and belonging are a matter of how they are positioned in a context (see Chapter 3). Through simply surfing the Web, but also reading scholarly papers, it is clear that this label is used differently in different contexts to refer to a heterogeneous group of people with different levels and forms of integration into the American and the Turkish society. On Wikipedia and on the “Notable Turkish Americans” page on the social network site Facebook, for instance, the label Turkish American is indiscriminately used to refer to people who range from American citizens of Turkish, Kurdish, Syrian, Greek, Armenian, Jewish and Azeri origins, to Turks living on a permanent basis in the US, to transnational migrants transcending and living across the borders of Turkey and of the United States, but also to American citizens married to Turks²⁵ or living in Turkey or still further, to people of mixed descent living neither in the US nor in Turkey.

In recent years, globalization processes have strongly changed societies, leading in many cases to a kind and degree of complexity surpassing anything that has been previously experienced (Vertovec, 2006; 2007a; 2007b). Minorities today do not consist of relatively homogenous and predictable groups but, as we have already seen for the Turkish American case for instance, migrants, even if they are attributed or attribute themselves “the same label”, often come from different countries, speak different languages, hold different denominations, values, cultures and ethnicities, have different educational and social backgrounds, different positions within society, have relocated through different channels and developed different adaptation patterns, may have different legal statuses and occupations and maintain different kind of bonds with their home countries or with other countries. In view of this situation, Vertovec, who focuses especially on the British context, highlights the inadequacy of multiculturalism as a way to understand and deal with the current situation. In this regard, he writes:

Multicultural policies have had as their overall goal the promotion of tolerance and respect for collective identities. This has been undertaken through supporting community

²⁵ For instance, Anastasia Ashman and Jennifer Eaton Gökmen, editors of the bestseller *Tales from the Expat Harem: Foreign Women in Modern Turkey* (2006) both have Turkish husbands and for a while they were listed among prominent Turkish Americans on Wikipedia (“List of Turkish Americans”).

associations and their cultural activities, monitoring diversity in the workplace, encouraging positive images in the media and other public spaces, and modifying public services (including education, health, policing and courts) in order to accommodate culture-based differences of value, language and social practice. While developed from the 1960s onwards, most of these policies and goals still obtain today. Multiculturalism continues to be discussed and delivered mainly in terms of the African-Caribbean and South Asian communities of British citizens.

New, smaller, less organized, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups have hardly gained attention or a place on the public agenda (cf. Kofman, 1998). Yet it is the growth of exactly these sorts of groups that has in recent years radically transformed the social landscape in Britain. The time has come to re-evaluate — in social scientific study as well as policy — the nature of diversity in Britain today. (Vertovec, 2006: 3)

The transformation of British society required a radical new approach. Diversity today is extremely heterogeneous and minorities, on their turn, have become highly unpredictable (Vertovec, 2006; 2007a; 2007b; Blommaert, and Rampton, 2011). In view of this overall situation, Vertovec describes the new stage of diversity within British society using the term “*super-diversity*” to indicate a level of complexity never experienced before:

Super-diversity is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables, including: country of origin (comprising a variety of possible subset traits such as ethnicity, language[s], religious tradition, regional and local identities, cultural values and practices), migration channel (often related to highly gendered flows, specific social networks and particular labour market niches), and legal status (including myriad categories determining a hierarchy of entitlements and restrictions). These variables co-condition integration outcomes along with factors surrounding migrants’ human capital (particularly educational background), access to employment (which may or may not be in immigrants’ hands), locality (related especially to material conditions, but also to other immigrant and ethnic minority presence), and the usually chequered responses by local authorities, service providers and local residents (which often tend to function by way of assumptions based on previous experiences with migrants and ethnic minorities). (Vertovec, 2007b: 3)

It is clear that the peculiar situation described by Vertovec through the use of the term “*super-diversity*” is not limited to Britain, but actually reflects the overall situation of a variety of countries and minority groups among which is certainly the one of the United States, in general, and the one of Turkish Americans, in particular. Recent studies have clearly shown that, starting from the 80s, the Turkish American situation has become increasingly complex

and diverse with the arrival in the US of very different groups and categories of migrants (see Di Carlo, 1998; 2008; Karpat, 2008; Kaya, 2004; 2007; 2009; Micallef, 2004; Saatçi, 2008; Tansel, and Güngör, 2003; Tokgöz, 2005). In the last three decades, in fact, the massive arrival of illegals, for instance, or of transnational professionals, of unskilled and temporary workers, religious conservatives, small businessmen, lower classes and graduate or post-graduate students has radically changed the overall situation of the Turkish American migrants who earlier generally were permanent settlers, highly-educated secular Turks well integrated into American society. Turkish Americans, as we will see also in Chapter 5, today have different nationalities, languages, ethnicities and denominations, they move for different reasons and through different channels and experience quite different processes of insertion within American society. Going back to the main aim of this project we can then ask: according to which criteria can Turkish Americanness be considered within a super-diverse context? In the next chapter I will focus on this question, and define in more detail my theoretical and overall methodological framework for addressing the complexities of Turkish Americanness.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND OVERALL METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The blogger “*Anonymously yours*”, in June 2007, posted a story entitled “Stupid Cupid” about her difficult search for love and daily life in the US as a Turkish American ‘gal’. There she wrote:

As usual, I'm in a state of complete confusion about dating. More specifically, I have been asking myself lately if ethnicity makes any difference to me when it comes to romantic relationships. In many ways it would be easier to date someone who is Turkish, for obvious reasons. The familiarity of our culture would lessen the painstaking efforts I'd have to make to explain the Turkish way of life to a "foreigner". On the other hand, I find that the Turkish men that I meet are just too Turkish for me. What's a Turkish-American girl to do?

The non-Turks that I date find the Turkish thing to be exotic. They like that I am somewhat of a "foreigner" to them yet totally American in many other ways. The Turkish men that I meet — and there haven't been many — expect me to act more Turkish than I really am. Is any of this making any sense?

As I stated in a previous post, I thought that the answer to my problem would be solved by going on Turkish Personals²⁶. Surely I'd meet a Turkish-American like myself; someone who understands and appreciates both cultures. Or so I had thought. But to my dismay, virtually every guy answered the questions on their profile in Turkish. And the ones that attempted to write in English had busted up English. Yet some of these guys identified themselves as being Turkish-American. They may have US citizenship but they are not Americanized in the least.

The few Turkish-American men that I have met, I just wasn't attracted to. It's tough enough finding Mr. Right but when you throw 2 cultures into the mix, it seems like a

²⁶ *Turkish Personals* is an online dating platform created to connect Turkish and Turkic people around the world.

formidable task. At this point, I'd be perfectly content with finding someone whose neuroses were compatible with mine. (Anonymously Yours)

This is a story about love. Or better, this is a story about the difficulties and frustrations that a Turkish American girl encounters during her search for love. At the same time, however, it is quite clear that this is also a story about identity. In the extract above, different intersecting and interrelating identities defined on the basis of a mix between cultural, national and ethnic belonging are represented. Anonymously yours is a girl like many. She is somewhere between her twenties and thirties, and desperately looking for a suitable partner. At a certain point during her search she wonders whether ethnicity should matter when choosing a partner. As a daughter of a Turkish family, she tried dating other Turks but this did not work out the way expected. Even if sharing a “common” culture and ethnic background was certainly a plus according to Anonymously yours, the Turkish men she dated were just “too Turkish” or, in other words, she simply was not Turkish enough in their eyes. The fact that she grew up in a small city in the United States certainly played a huge role in “shaping her Turkishness”. On the one hand, the blogger would consider herself Turkish, on the other, having spent most of her time in the US and speaking English as her primary language²⁷, she also significantly identifies as an American. Nevertheless, in this case, sharing a geographical space and a certain number of cultural aspects of daily life seems to be not enough to create common ground between her and other Americans. While they certainly hold some characteristics in common, Turkish Americans and Americans are also depicted as radically “different” and this is exactly what makes Anonymously yours so familiar and at the same time so exotic in the eyes of her potential partners. Fundamentally different from Turks, as well as from Americans, the blogger seems to be trapped in a space in between, where she does not belong to any well-defined category, but at the same time she is not completely excluded. This “ambiguity”, the impossibility of setting clear borders and guidelines for belonging, reflects the difficulty in characterizing Turkish Americanness and identities more in general.

Turkish Americanness in the passage above is clearly characterized by relational differences. Being Turkish American, for Anonymously yours, is something that can be mainly described in negative terms; the main issue is not “what Turkish Americans actually are”, but rather “what they are not”. Turkish Americans, thus, are defined in oppositional terms as “non-American” and “non-Turkish”. Despite possible similarities, they are presented as having different lifestyles, different ethnic and cultural heritages, and different conceptions of gender

roles. This way of looking at Turkish Americanness, however, is not totally unproblematic. While on one hand Anonymously yours claims that Turkish Americans cannot comfortably date Turks or Americans because of fundamental differences, on the other, she bridges those discontinuities by recognizing common characteristics. Furthermore, in the text, the same conception of Turkish Americanness as a sort of sameness expressed through differences that transcends the boundaries of citizenship seems to be equally problematic. Anonymously yours, while looking for someone like herself, ends up getting in contact with people whom she perceives once again as radically different. Or, in other words, the people from Turkish Personals are simply “fake” Turkish Americans for the blogger. Why, then, do they identify themselves as such? And, what actually is Turkish Americanness, then? Or, in more general terms, we first have to ask: what exactly is identity, and how can it be analyzed?

The aim of this chapter is to answer these latter questions and to provide my project with a theoretical framework. For doing so, I will begin by drawing an overview of different approaches to identities and introduce key concepts, theories and overall methodological guidelines relevant to the understanding of this study as a whole. Since my research is based on quite diverse types of data (i.e. websites, interviews and literature), detailed information about their relevance for the project, their collection and selection, will be given separately from chapter to chapter (Chapters 4-6).

This section has been organized in the following way. First, in view of overall considerations of the present and past use of the term “Turkish American”, essentialism, as a way to approach identities, will be discussed. Consequently this chapter will focus on the crisis identities are currently experiencing. In the third section, hybridity will be discussed and it will be explained why this specific approach, which actually is quite popular especially within the area of Turkish American and Muslim American studies, is not really useful for explaining the phenomena I am investigating. The chapter will continue with a focus on Stuart Hall’s identity theory, followed by a section about discourse and an overview of *Critical Discourse Analysis* that certainly has been of huge inspiration for this work. The chapter will finish, then, with a focus on Jan Blommaert’s work on discourse and identity and an exploration of the main concepts and guidelines that I used for analyzing my data.

²⁷ From other posts readers get to know that Anonymously yours has mainly a passive competence in Turkish.

3.2 ESSENTIALISM AND THE CRISIS OF TRADITIONAL IDENTITIES

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall (1993a), one of the founding fathers of Cultural Studies, writes that there are at least two fundamental ways of conceiving identities. While a traditional approach conceptualizes identity in terms of an essential and a priori sameness, in fact it is also possible to look at the issue from another, more dynamic perspective. With a specific focus on Caribbean identity, he writes:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of 'Caribbeanness', of the black experience. It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation. [...]

There is, however, a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather since history has intervened — 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side — the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's 'uniqueness'. (Hall, 1993a: 223-5)

The difference between those two perspectives can be mainly regarded as a difference between an essentialist and a non-essentialist approach to identity. According to an essentialist perspective, Anonymously yours, for instance, would be Turkish American, as she possesses a set of characteristics which are uniquely “Turkish American”. Turkish Americanness, in this definition, would be considered a combination of unchanging traits — such as culture and ethnicity but also language, lifestyle and gender roles — that automatically exclude the possibility of admitting the existence of internal diversities. Any deviance from the rule — as in the case of those “supposedly” Turkish Americans with a limited proficiency in English — thus would be perceived as non-authentic or fake. A non-essentialist approach,

instead, would define Turkish Americanness on the basis of differences as well as of sameness, and would focus on how this definition has changed diachronically through history as well as synchronically in relation to different contexts. In Chapter 1, I anticipated that this study will rely on this second approach to identities. Before explaining in more detail this perspective, I will first, however, focus on essentialism and its different “varieties”, discussing the main issues that arise from this way of looking at identities.

Essentialist approaches to identity are characterized by the fundamental assumption that identity is a projection of a pure self. Taylor, in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), traces back this peculiar way of looking at identity to the Renaissance, and more specifically to the Enlightenment movement and to the work of Locke and Descartes. The two philosophers, according to Taylor (1989), defining on the one hand the self in terms of an accumulation of experience and knowledge in the mind, and theorizing, on the other, the separation of mind from the body, set the basis for the development of a conception of identity as something existing within the self, which is autonomous from the external world. During the first half of the 19th century, the Romantic Movement re-elaborated the notion of identity, starting from the premises set by the Enlightenment. Rather than focusing on the centrality of cognition, however, Taylor observes that nature and impulse during this period started to be considered the main features at the basis of identities. Benwell and Stokoe (2007), in *Discourse and Identity*, elaborate on Taylor’s analysis, arguing that the Romantic conception of identity “can be traced through to contemporary, late modern and populist notion of the ‘true’, ‘authentic’ self, enshrined in a thousand self-help books and magazines [...]” that look at identity still as a reflection of an inner, original self (19-20).

Applied to the development and definition of collective identities —that is the main point of reflection in this study— essentialism basically argues that a certain group possesses and shares unique features that other groups do not and cannot possess. This uniqueness, however, might be inferred from a variety —or eventually a set— of universal and immutable truths that make individuals substantially different. Identity, from this perspective, might be understood in terms, for instance, of natural, biological or genetic features. In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, as we have seen above, Hall (1993a) mainly focuses on the definition of cultural identity, but an essentialist approach can be applied to any kind of identity. Sex and gender identities, for instance, are quite often defined in terms of universal biological and natural characteristics, on the basis of which a certain understanding and division of social roles is

motivated. Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1984), states that very clearly. There he writes:

The notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasure, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as universal signified. (Foucault, 1984: 154)

Similarly, racial and ethnic identities are usually based on the idea of unique biological and spiritual features shared within a specific group. The *Manifesto of the Racist Scientists* published in the newspaper *Giornale d'Italia* on 14 July 1938 offers a clear example of the typical arguments used by essentialist thinkers:

1. Human races exist. The existence of human races is not only an abstraction of our spirit but it corresponds to a phenomenal and material reality that can be perceived through our senses. This reality is represented by the masses, almost always huge, of millions of men sharing similar physical and psychological features that were inherited and will keep being inherited. Claiming that races exist does not imply that inferior or superior races exist but just that different human races exist.

[...]5. In history, the arrival of huge masses of people is a legend. After the Lombards' invasion there have been no other relevant movements of people toward Italy capable of influencing the racial physiognomy of the nation. On the basis of these observations it can be inferred that while in other nations the racial composition has notably changed also in recent times, in Italy, as regards its main traits, the racial composition of today is the same as thousand years ago: thus, today the majority of the forty-four million Italians traces back to those families that have been living in Italy since, at least, thousand years.

6. There exists, at this point, a pure "Italian race". This statement is not based on the confusion of the biological concept of race with the historical-linguistic concept of people and nation but on the very pure ties of blood that bond the Italians of today together with the generations that since thousand years inhabit Italy.

7. It is time for the Italians to declare themselves racist. Everything that the regime has done until now in Italy is substantially racist. Very frequent has been in the discourses of the Leader²⁸ the reference to the concept of race. The issue of racism in Italy should be considered from a pure biological point of view, without philosophic or religious aims. The conception of racism in Italy should be essentially Italian and the orientation Arian-Nordic. This does not mean, however, that the theories of the German racism should be introduced

as they are or that it can be claimed that Italians and Scandinavians are the same thing. But it only wants to give Italians a physical and especially a psychological model of human race that for its pure European characters is detached from all the other extra-European races; this means to raise Italians to a superior ideal of self-conscience and of major responsibility[...]. (“Manifesto degli Scienziati Razzisti”. My translation)

The uniqueness at the basis of essentialist approaches to identities, besides being derived from hypothetical sameness inscribed in the body as in the extract above, quite often has also been founded on other supposedly unchangeable similarities fixed in culture, religion or a primordial homeland. These perspectives on identities mainly claim the existence of immutable characteristics indiscriminately holding together individuals within the same



Figure 1: Ribolla (2004). One of the leaflets of the MGP (Padan Youth Movement of Lega Nord) from 2004. “Free men” ... the young Padan does not follow any ideology but lives in the name of values. He is not the instrument of the right or of the left but he is the emanation of the spirit of freedom that permeates our lands” (my translation).

cultural, religious or national groups. In some parts of the Manifesto of the Racist Scientists, for instance, one can observe a conception of national identity based on the fundamental assumption that Italians must share a common culture and history. Fichte²⁹, in his *Addresses to the German Nation* (2013), similarly, founds Germanness on the concept of an immutable “Spirit” as a unifying element keeping together the people of the nation. A more recent example of this variety of essentialism can be found, for instance, in the political campaigns of the separatist movement *Lega Nord*³⁰ in Italy (Figure 1).

Any essentialist approach is based on the problematic assumption that identities are self-enclosed and immutable truths that do not change across time or through space. In the current

²⁸ The first letter of the word “Capo” — that here has been translated with “Leader” (i.e. Mussolini) — is capitalized in the original.

²⁹ Fichte (1762 - 1814) was a German philosopher who significantly contributed to German nationalism. The book *Addresses to the German Nation* (*Reden an die Deutsche Nation*) was originally published in German in 1808.

³⁰ Lega Nord, for instance, promotes Northern Italian identity, sponsoring a series of events such the election of Miss Padania, the festival of Northern Folks, the *BerghemFest*, the National Day of Northern Women, the Lombardy Festival and the symposium on the language of Bergamo through which the physical and cultural features supposedly holding together Padan people are celebrated.

conjuncture, the creation and diffusion of new media, the development of faster and cheaper transportation facilities, increasingly complex patterns of migration, transnationality (Vertovec, 1999; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton, 1995) and super-diversity (Vertovec, 2006; 2007a; 2007b) have further served to problematize identities, making identity issues a particularly timely and challenging field of research (see Chapter 2). During the recent decades, changing historical conditions and the emergence of an increasing complexity and heterogeneity within communities and societies have given rise to doubts regarding the validity of totalizing metanarratives³¹ upon which traditional collective identities were built in the past (Lyotard, 1979; Hall, 1991; 1993a). The current debates on citizenship and belonging within the nation state, for instance, can be considered clear examples of the crisis collective identities are undergoing today. Despite the fact that nationalist parties might still promote the idea of an “essential sameness”, holding individuals together through changed historical and spatial conditions, this belief, in fact, is clearly problematic to hold in view of the current situation. The emergence and presence of increasingly complex differences among members of communities underscores the fragility of a system of identification based on homogeneity, opening what can be regarded by some as a crisis of identities (see Erikson, 1968; Woodward, 1997; Hall, 1993b). Thus, it is necessary to urgently redefine the borders of membership and belonging according to different criteria that enables describing this complexity rather than giving a simplified account of present-day identities and belongings.

In *Language and Mobility*, Pennycook (2012) uses the term “metrolingualism” in order to “describe the way in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language. [The concept, therefore,] does not assume connections between culture, ethnicity, nationality or geography, but rather seeks to explore how such relations are produced, resisted, deified or rearranged [...]” (Pennycook, 2012: 18). Language, explains Pennycook, floats across different contexts and sometimes shows up in unexpected places or forms. Metrolingualism as a concept points at this unexpectedness, and the fact that the relation between language, territory, culture, and ethnicity is far less expected than often assumed. (Un)expectedness, in fact, or the idea that language is (or is not) in the “exact place” is a construction of specific modes of thought which determine what is normative within certain contexts (Pennycook, 2012: 20).

³¹ The concept of metanarratives as totalizing and structuring semiotic systems giving meaning to reality as a uniform space devoid of differences and fragmentations was introduced by Jean François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in 1979. The concept — in this case referred to as “grand

Drawing on Pennycook, a fruitful approach to the complexity of many contemporary identities might be to look at them in terms of *metroidentities*, or identities showing up in unexpected places and forms. This definition would take into account both the existence of expected or normative identities, as well as their diversity in the reality of human social interactions.

3.3 HYBRID AND HYPHENATED IDENTITIES: TURKISH-AMERICANS

Identities have always mattered, but identity issues have become particularly timely in recent decades³². In the past few years we have witnessed once more the disastrous potential of essentialism during the war in the Balkans, for instance. Globalization, as well as the emergence of “hybrid” identities, has seriously challenged essentialism by revealing its inadequacy to describe the complexity of the current conjuncture. It is within this situation that the need for a different way to look at identities starts to emerge. Essentialism is not only potentially dangerous, but in view of the mutated global context, collective identities can also hardly be conceived in terms of uniqueness. Second- and third-generation migrants, such as Anonymously yours, who often feel like being the final result of two cultures “thrown together”, can be considered a tangible example of the failure of essentialism and of its fixed boundaries. It is in view of this situation that the concept of hybrid — or hyphenated³³ — identities started to be used so as to overcome the difficulties resulting from the fixity of traditional definitions. Dealing with identities emerging from the encounter or clash of different cultures, Homi Bhabha (1988; 1994; 1996) can be considered one of the first academics to use and define this concept. In *Culture's in Between*, Bhabha writes:

This 'part' culture, this partial culture, is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures — at once the impossibility of culture's containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture's 'in-between', bafflingly both alike and different. To enlist in the defence of this 'unhomely', migratory, partial nature of culture we must revive that archaic meaning of 'list' as 'limit' or 'boundary'. Having done so, we introduce into the

narratives” — is also used by Hall in various texts among which, for instance, is the one referred to above (1993a).

³² Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2012) criticizes the idea of the exceptionality of globalization and, focusing on the current debate about identities, he claims that multiple cultural layers and “intersecting jurisdictions” are not peculiar features of the recent decades but are all issues that can also be found throughout world history, in Europe as well as elsewhere (17). Despite his observations, however, it is also true that mass migrations, the internet, social media, telecommunications and fast and cheaper means of transport are making the current conjuncture quite peculiar and not only in the West but also globally.

³³ The adjectives “hybrid” and “hyphenated” and the words “hybridization” and “hyphenation” are often used as synonyms (for instance Bhabha, 1994; Fine, 1994; Fine, and Şirin, 2007; Kapchan, and Turner Strong, 1999).

polarizations of liberals and liberationists the sense that the translation of cultures, whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, 'peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash'. The peculiarity of cultures' partial, even metonymic presence lies in articulating those social divisions and unequal developments that disturb the self-recognition of the national culture, its anointed horizons of territory and tradition. The discourse of minorities, spoken for and against in the multicultural wars, proposes a social subject constituted through cultural hybridization, the overdetermination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling likeness and banal divergence. (Bhabha, 1996: 54)

From a certain perspective the liminality of hybrid, interstitial identities defined by Bhabha, challenging the boundaries of the grand narratives of essentialism and destroying at the same time the basis upon which they were founded, seems to adapt quite well to the current conjuncture: this concept questions the fixity of the borders of traditional identities inscribing the self — individual or collective — in a more dynamic dimension. Hybrid identities are conceived as a third space in-between, where differences among cultures, independently from the hierarchical structures that usually regulate their interaction, are translated through a process that implies a transformation of relevant loss into something completely new (Bhabha, 1994). From this perspective, Turkish-Americanness could be considered as an identity that comprises features — whether perceived as compatible or not — both of Americanness and Turkishness, but that at the same time goes far beyond their combination. The specific case of Anonymously yours discussed above could perfectly be used to illustrate this approach. The blogger, as the daughter of a Turkish family who grew up in the US, clearly seems to be suspended in a “third space” in-between exclusion and belonging within which she tries to negotiate her “two” identities; on the one hand the ethnic and cultural identity transmitted to her by her “Turkish” parents, and on the other the cultural identity she has developed living in the US.

The concept of hybridity formulated by Bhabha, besides offering an approach to the study of translocal and post-colonial identities (see for instance Fine, and Şirin, 2007; Yeğenoğlu, 2005), has also been frequently applied to a variety of other disciplines — from gender studies to linguistics and urban studies — and has been used to re-frame traditional cultural, ethnic and national identities within the context of globalization. The flow of ideas, discourses and goods across national borders challenges the fixity of the boundaries of local cultural identities, creating in the meanwhile new hybrids. As Smith phrases it:

As a global culture, economy, and society are spreading, local communities continue efforts to maintain their particular cultural, economic, and social customs. Hybridity has become one way to re-create and re-vision a local community, while incorporating elements of outside groups, such as the global culture. The hybrid allows for the perpetration of the local in the context of the global — using global selectively while continuing essential elements of the local. [...]The creation of a hybrid identity crosses borders, as the local and the global interact to create a new identity that is distinct. It also challenges existing borders, particularly those of political and ethnic communities. Yet hybridity can only exist in a world with borders. The creation of hybrid identities is evidence that borders are shifting, reformed, and being created. (Smith, 2008: 5-6)

From this perspective, in the current conjuncture almost any culture would actually be thinkable as hybrid or hyphenated. The borders once defining traditional identities have been definitely challenged not only by the arrivals and the settlement of migrants coming from different countries, speaking different languages and having different socio-economic, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, but also by global cultural flows challenging the boundaries of national, religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural belonging. The concept of hybridity certainly has the merit of pointing at the dynamicity and boundlessness of identities. This approach nevertheless, as Çağlar suggests in *Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of Culture* (1997), can also be highly problematic. While on the one hand the aim of hybridity is to challenge essentialism, on the other hand, it can also be claimed that essentialism is taken somehow for granted as hyphenation is something that actually works only in between the pre-established boundaries of ontologically different cultures. The necessity of eventually dynamic but still fixed *limina*, of well-defined thresholds, seems to imply a fundamentally monolithic, closed and substantially unproblematic vision of identities; a “confused” form of essentialism that actually fails to address complexity, still seeing culture as an object with specific characteristics which can be mixed and blended with others (see Friedman, 1995: 82). Çağlar, moreover, suggests that the problem of hyphenation and hybridization is that fundamentally those concepts assume culture to be embedded within ethnic and spatial boundaries. She writes:

The interchangeable use of “hybrid” and “hyphenated” identities within such approaches illustrates this unproblematized relationship between territory, culture and ethnicity. In such a perspective, the boundary-setting process fails to be endowed with a real processual character. Although hybridity ascribes culture and identity with “fluidity”, they remain anchored in territorial ideas, whether national or transnational. Hence, despite

these celebrations of “difference”, hybridity discourses set limits to these “differences”. The sources of “diversity” are pre-given rather than being practice bound. Otherwise it wouldn’t have been possible to treat culture as a code or a substance. (Çağlar, 1997:173)

In the Turkish American case, hyphenation would arguably imply the existence of two self-enclosed cultural, national, local and ethnic Others in relation to which Turkish-Americanness is necessary linked; a homogenous and unproblematic Turkishness located in today’s Turkey, as well as a uniform Americanness existing within the US borders. However, Turkishness and Americanness are two labels that today especially are hardly definable within rigid boundaries of any kind (including territorial), and the internal diversities within the two already make this approach problematic — not only theoretically, but also practically: which characteristics exactly, for instance, can we consider as “authentically” Turkish today? Collective identities are processes through which people recognize themselves or Others to be similar in respect to something. As Benedict Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities* (1991), they imagine sharing a certain story and certain characteristics: a language, a religion, a set of norms, a common past. However, since these characteristics are imagined, they cannot be consistently defined as even in the smallest groups the parameters regulating identification and belonging can vary considerably depending on the context.

It should be acknowledged that hybridization, despite not really being able to propose an alternative answer to the questions raised by the recent debate about identities, certainly has the merit of having stressed the need of a more dynamic and fluid approach to the issue. It is also important to highlight, however, that similarly to essentialism, hybridization, as a way of thinking identities, may have serious and tangible consequences. It can be claimed, in fact, that this approach indirectly justifies segregation and violence to preserve safety and cultural homogeneity, supporting certain interpretations of cultural relativism that today are quite popular, foreseeing a clash between civilizations as the only unavoidable solution (see for instance Huntington, 1996).

3.4 IDENTITIES AS DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

The failure of essentialist argumentations in regard to the present conjuncture clearly illustrates the impossibility of conceptualizing identities as something fixed and always identical through time and space. In view of the situation described in Chapter 2, it is clear that today any kind of essentialist approach to collective identities can and should no longer be supported. Holding such a position would not only be anachronistic but, considering the

internal heterogeneity and the high level of complexity that characterizes groups and communities, would also inevitably bring about the negation of identities as such. Stuart Hall, discussing Marxism and his own identification as a Marxist, explains, however, that the erosion of essentialism should not be regarded as an overall crisis of identities, but rather as a predicament caused by an inadequate thinking of the issue itself (Hall, 1991: 43-4; Woodward, 1997: 15-9). The efficacy and the presence of 'old' identities — or, to put it in other words, of old ways of conceiving identities — in the world cannot be completely disregarded. "Traditional" identities still matter and today people often give meaning to themselves and to others by using labels that came into existence for the first time in a quite a remote past dominated by essentialism. In society there are still Marxists, for instance, as there are Muslims or Turks, but those identities today cannot and should not be conceived anymore as homogenous. Traditional labels have clearly not disappeared but rather, according to Hall (1991), they have substantially changed as they do not find themselves anymore in the same place within the field of identities as they did in the past. Exposed to diverse social, temporal and epistemological conditions, "traditional" identities today have become radically different as both their structuring and totalizing force within society, as well as the way we look at them, have changed; rather than focusing only on totalizing similarities we have also started to pay attention to internal differences and fragmentations (Hall, 1991). If rather than looking at identities in terms of fixed and structuring samenesses, then, they are conceived as socially constructed discursive practices under constant change, not only can we see a solution to overcome their "crisis", but this would also probably facilitate a more peaceful acceptance and understanding among people. As Hall puts it:

[...]The concept of identity deployed here is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one. That is today, directly contrary to what appears to be its settled semantic career, this concept of identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time. Nor — if we translate this essentializing conception to the stage of cultural identity — is it that 'collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed "selves" which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common' and which can stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging 'oneness' or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences. It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but

multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions [...]. (Hall, 2000: 3)

The differences between these two approaches, however, turn into a clear and strong incompatibility especially when they come to the very basis of the establishment of identities. While essentialists subordinate their existence to uniqueness — a cultural, a national or a racial uniqueness for instance — Hall (1996a), on the other hand, suggests positioning the making of identities at the intersection of a series of meaning practices of production, consumption, representation and regulation that are at the very basis of culture. The “circuit of culture” is a fundamental concept for understanding Hall’s approach to identities. In the introduction to *Doing Cultural Studies: the Story of the Sony Walkman*, Hall and Du Gay (1997) explain that culture, instead of being a set of fixed characteristics, should be regarded as a dynamic system of meanings which are produced and exchanged through deeply connected processes. Meanings, therefore, are what regulate the life of people, give them a sense of identity and belonging, guide their consumption and production practices and influence their way of understanding and representing the world. Meanings can also be considered as what the ones in power try to produce and direct in order to keep their hegemonic position (Hall, 1997a).

The “circuit of culture” in Figure 2 shows how meaning is shaped and circulates in society. While in the Figure, for reasons of clarity, each process is represented as separate from the others, each of those “moments” should be considered as inextricably related and synchronic to the others. A study on identity, therefore, would necessarily require an overall investigation of culture, implying an analysis of the complexly interrelated processes through which meaning is produced and regulated. From this perspective all processes of representation, production, consumption and regulation such as the organization of public festivals, the sharing of certain stories, the celebration of specific festivities, the choice of speaking a specific language, the avoidance or the consumption of certain foods and drinks, the use of specific clothes and accessories or the interest toward certain sports and teams through which Turkish Americanness is built can be considered as relevant.

People sharing the same identity are supposed to share a broadly similar way of making sense and giving meaning to the world. According to Hall, this similarity should not be considered as “too unitary” as in each culture “there is always a great diversity of meanings about any topic and more than one way of interpreting or representing it” (1997a: 2). As Varis, Wang and Du

(2011) claim, also identity is not “one”, but can be rather considered as a set of varieties or a repertoire of interrelated but always different meanings produced and shared by diverse voices that continuously change through time while also contemporarily maintaining a connection with the past. Hall’s conceptualization of identities as empty signifiers, thus, should be regarded from this particular perspective (1997b). Just as the referent of a sign is

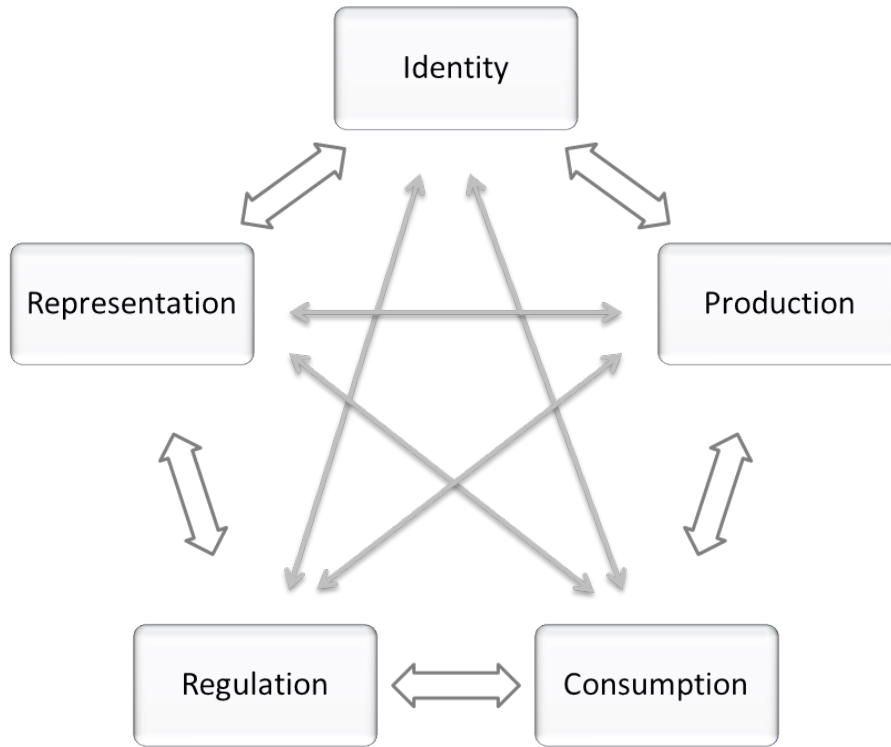


Figure 2: “The circuit of culture”. Adapted from: Du Gay, Hall, et al. (1997: 3).

never ultimately defined, the meaning of identities is constantly postponed through a never-ending collection of relational meanings³⁴. It is a logical consequence, therefore, that this study, as any other study about identity, can only be incomplete and partial. Adopting this perspective on identity, in fact, I will have the possibility to analyze only some of the possible ways in which Turkish Americanness is built as any definition will absolutely be positional. Different ways of thinking and understanding the same identity, as we will see for instance from a comparison between the websites of two popular and powerful Turkish American

³⁴ This way of conceiving identities might raise questions of political usefulness. Some might argue that considering identities as constantly changing semiotic positionings would undermine social cohesion. The point, however, is that essentialism, today, does not help us to better understand identities or improve our lives within society(ies) while looking at identities as discursive might potentially offer a solution to identity-based hatreds.

associations, are necessarily related to the specific cultural, social and historical positioning of the ones issuing those meanings (Hall, 1991; 1993b; 1996; 2002).

Briefly summarizing, the circuit of culture refers to the overall processes through which culture, as a complex set of meanings, is continuously (re-)produced and shared through discourse (the notion of “discourse” will be discussed in more detail below). Each moment, or each practice, within the circuit contributes to the creation of culture and is indissolubly related to the others. Identity, as one of those processes, thus, can be considered as a semiotic practice that, however, is not “unique” but may significantly vary according to how people give meaning to the world. The position people have in relation to different factors, as we will see throughout this study, can deeply influence their overall perspective on identity, belonging and culture. Hall also introduces a third fundamental factor concerning the making of identities, highlighting the important role that the Other plays within this process. He observes that more than being considered in terms of sameness, identity should be rather conceived as a difference (Hall, 1991; 1993b; 1996a). Who we are, in fact, as in the case of Anonymously yours, strongly depends on who we do not want to be and Turkish Americanness, in her case, is obviously expressed in terms of a difference in respect to both Americans and Turks. It is necessary to note that in this case difference cannot be conceived as a permanent opposition, but configures itself as something dynamic and always related to the specific position that the self has in time, space and society. Hall, drawing on Derrida, proposes, then, to conceive identity as a “différance” from a juxtaposition of the French verbs ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’, so as to signal a permanent procrastination of meaning (1991: 49-50).

The role that the Other has in the making of identity, however, can be fully understood only by looking in more detail at the ambivalent role that s/he plays in the whole process. On one hand, the Other can be considered as a subject/object located outside the self through which identity is defined from an external perspective. Turkish Americans, therefore, might understand their own identity in terms of a difference both from Turks and from Americans. At the same time it is also true that the Other can be perceived only from the particular position of the self. Therefore, from a certain perspective, it can be claimed that s/he also belongs to the self. In the next chapters, we will clearly see that the Others in relation to which Turkish Americanness is defined may significantly vary according to the specific position the subject has in relation to a broader context. The supporters of the religious movement guided by the Turkish imam Gülen, for instance, recognize in non-Muslims one of their most relevant

Others, while the secularist elite might rather see Islamist groups as completely different from themselves.

The role of the Other is also particularly important regarding the influence her/his representations of the subject can have on the way the subject her/himself gives meaning to her/his own identity. The way the self is seen from the Other's perspective, in fact, might have a considerable impact on how identity is defined. For instance, in Chapter 4 the fundamental role that the Other and her/his representations play in the making of Muslim Turkish American identities emerges quite clearly through the pro-interfaith dialogue and tolerance discourse promoted on the website of a gülenist association near Atlanta (GE). As the definition of Turkish Americanness cannot start from a blank page, it is necessary for the spiritual leaders to re-discuss the stereotypes circulating in the US (and Turkey) about Turks, Muslims and the Gülen movement³⁵ in order to give meaning to their own identity as a group. Similarly, in the current conjuncture, it is also possible to observe that the making of Turkish American identities is strictly related to the support, the denial or the revision of other Western stereotypes about Turks and Arabs more generally (see Chapters 4 and 6). Considering as an overall rule that the distance between two subjects is directly proportional to the approximation of the categories into which they are inscribed by the other (Blommaert, 2006: 207), the fact that Turkish American identity at the moment exists mainly in relation to the Americans' discourses about Turkishness, Arabness and Islam should not be surprising. People are usually extremely precise when dividing into different categories what they know, while they tend to generalize things with which they are not familiar. Turkish Americans, as I explained in Chapter 2, are a relatively small and new group at the moment and not many discourses created by Others specifically about them are in circulation. This does not mean, however, that Turkish Americans are completely free from being classified according to the categories through which the Other makes sense of the world. Turkish Americans, in fact, are often considered by Americans, for instance, as Turks, or even more broadly as Arabs and Muslims and this certainly, as we will see in more detail in the next chapters, has a strong impact on the way they build their own way of giving meaning to themselves.

³⁵ As I wrote in Chapter 1, it is particularly important here that the Gülen movement has been accused, and not only in Turkey, of holding Islamist positions. The topic is extremely controversial; for the purposes of this study, however, it can be observed that the interfaith dialogue discourse by the *gülençiler* goes side by side with an overall discourse that is not incompatible with Islamism but that, on the contrary, shares with it some common features.

3.5 DEFINING DISCOURSE

In the next chapters I will focus on how discourses produce Turkish American identity(ies), defining belonging as well as alterity in relation to different contexts. Within this study, I will consider Turkish Americanness as a boundless and open category that is positionally defined and definable through *discourse*. Discourses, considered “no longer [...] as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972: 49), will thus be the main objects of analysis in this study. Looking in more detail at the various definitions of the concept, it can be observed that discourse is quite a controversial term; depending on the academic tradition, it has been given several different meanings. Bucholtz (2003), and Blommaert (2005) observe, however, that it is possible to recognize at least two main approaches to the issue and, while one can be considered to be more language-oriented, the other rather focuses on the function of discourse and, thus, on its context. About the former, Bucholtz writes:

Within linguistics, the predominant definition of discourse is a formal one, deriving from the organization of the discipline into levels of linguistic units, such as phonology, morphology and syntax. According to the formal definition, just as morphology is the level of language in which sounds are combined into words, and syntax is the level in which words are combined into sentences, so discourse is the linguistic level in which sentences are combined into larger units. (Bucholtz, 2003: 44)

The interdisciplinary contact between linguists and other scholars coming from fields such as anthropology, philosophy or sociology has also brought about a definition of discourse as “language in action”(Bucholtz, 2004: 44) or “language in-use” (Blommaert, 2005: 2). This is also the one applied in this study. According to this definition, not only is language considered as a valuable object of investigation, but also other details often neglected — such as the contexts within which the communicative act takes place — become worthy of being analyzed. Discourse, from this perspective, is usually regarded as a semiotic practice that comprises not only language but also other modes of semiosis — for instance font, images, color, choice of medium, situation, audience etc. — that concur to the construction of meaning. Hall, drawing on Foucault, writes that:

Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But...since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do — our conduct

— all practices have a discursive aspect. It is important to note that the concept of discourse in this usage is not purely a “linguistic concept”. It is about language and practice. It attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between what one says (language) and what one does (practice). (Hall, 1997a: 44)

The need to define discourse from a perspective that is not exclusively linguistic and to reposition semiosis within a wider framework can be fully understood by looking in more detail at some of the contemporary practices through which meanings are conveyed. It is quite evident that especially today, in many cases texts or images as well as sounds are just some of the elements that contribute to the creation of meaning and a website (as in Chapter 4), an advertisement or a Facebook page, for instance, can be considered to be quite clear examples of what was just explained above. In those cases, it is a whole set of features (i.e. others’ as well as one’s own posts, pictures, font size used, applications, likes, etc.) that can be used to build a discourse about the identity of a certain Facebook user, blogger, company, or consumer.

From our discussion so far, the central role that discourse has in the making of identities is quite clear. This implies that a study on Turkish Americanness is mainly a study of the discursive practices through which Turkish American identities are defined. Taking discourse as a main object of analysis, and therefore undertaking discourse analysis, does present some challenges, the main one of which has to do with the variety of methodological approaches available. Each of those approaches is based on more or less different theoretical and empirical premises. An in-depth discussion and comparison of different perspectives and methods is beyond the scope of this study (for that, see, for instance Bucholtz, 2003; Jaworski, and Coupland, 1999); in the following, I will briefly introduce Critical Discourse Analysis, the approach most useful for my purposes, and its basic tenets.

3.6 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: BASIC TENETS

Norman Fairclough is considered by many to be the father of CDA, and his book *Language and Power* (1989) is usually regarded as the starting point of Critical Discourse Analysis. Despite this more or less general agreement it should be noted, however, that CDA is far from being a homogenous approach to the analysis of discourse; rather, under this label are grouped and operate a set of different scholars who, drawing on post-structuralism, social semiotics and Marxist theories, look at social and power relations in terms of linguistic and discursive

practices³⁶. From a broad perspective it can be claimed that the object of critique in CDA is the relationship between language and social structure. Critical Discourse Analysis, as also Cultural Studies, is based on the fundamental assumption that discourse is a socially constructed practice that, in turn, is constructive of societies. Or, more specifically, CDA can also be defined as the analysis of how power structures operate and are imposed through discourse. Drawing on Foucault, discourse is conceived as an “instrument” through which power is constantly built and exerted (Bucholtz, 2003: 57). The main aim of CDA is thus to make explicit how structures of dominance are reproduced in society through discursive practices. Since collective identities produce, and at the same time are produced by power and social relations existing between different groups, CDA can actually be regarded as a very appropriate approach to their investigation. In addition to these shared analytic purposes, CDA is usually also given critical, moral and political purposes as one of its basic tenets is to focus on social issues, highlighting inequalities and abuses (Blommaert, 2005: 25; Meyer, 2001: 30; van Dijk, 1993; 2001b: 353). In the words of van Dijk:

Unlike other discourse analysts, critical discourse analysts (should) take an explicit sociopolitical stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large. Although not in each stage of theory formation and analysis, their work is admittedly and ultimately political. Their hope, if occasionally illusory, is change through critical understanding. Their perspective, if possible, that of those who suffer most from dominance and inequality. (van Dijk, 1993: 252)

While there is a general agreement on the aims of CDA, on its object of critique and its political and critical engagement, there is much less consensus when it comes to defining its approach from an empirical perspective. CDA, more than offering a homogenous way of collecting and approaching data, can be rather defined as an hermeneutic “attitude” (van Dijk, 2001a: 96) toward social issues that, besides relying on assumptions and concepts usually drawn from linguistics and post-structuralism, also makes use of a variety of approaches and theories developed within other disciplines (Meyer, 2001: 23-5). As mentioned above, attention to language use is one of the central features of CDA. A second important aspect of Critical Discourse Analysis is its social engagement, and the third main feature of CDA, already discussed in passing, is that “language (and discourse thus) is studied for what it tells about

³⁶ For an historical and a comparative outlook on CDA see Blommaert (2005), Wodak, and Meyer (2001), Meyer (2001); van Dijk (2001a; 2001b) and Fairclough (2001).

society” (Blommaert, and Bulcaen, 2000: 459). CDA, therefore, can be defined as a research strategy to explore power relations in and through discourse. In this respect the plea for multidisciplinary mentioned in the previous section should be considered as a direct consequence of this position and the reasons behind this choice are to be found directly in its object of study, i.e. society. Considering the complexity of power and social structures, only an approach that relies on a number of disciplines and theories can adequately address social issues. Concepts as well as methodologies, therefore, are not determined a priori but they should be selected case by case according to the specificity of the situations observed (van Dijk, 1993; 2001a; 2001b). It is from this perspective that my decision to engage in this project by relying on different methodologies, theories and data should be understood. Discourses about Turkish American identities — as any other discourses about identity — reproduce certain ways of understanding and giving meaning to society(ies), as well as certain relations of power and structures of dominance. As we will see in practice in the following pages, however, those discourses may be embedded into a variety of social practices and therefore their observation and analysis clearly require diverse approaches. Hence, throughout this study, analytical concepts as well as methods of data collection will be introduced chapter by chapter.

Besides these basic tenets, Critical Discourse Analysis, being the outcome of the work of various scholars, does not exactly provide coherent guidelines for the collection and analysis of data, but in this respect different approaches have been developed. Fairclough, as also Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000: 448-9) note, in *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), attempts to establish a practical methodological framework that divides the analysis of discourses into three main stages, the first of which requires considering discourse *as a text*. At this stage, attention is given to the linguistic features and to the formal organization of a discourse: the analyst should mainly focus on aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and structure considering, for instance, word/sign choices and figures of speech, the transitivity of verbs, genre, time and person implied in the discourse, conjunctions and the relation between story, plot and narration. A second stage entails the analysis of discourse *as a discursive practice*. At this point, attention should be mainly given to the connections between a text and other discourses and, consequently, features such as *intertextuality* (defined as the explicit reference of a text to another one) and *interdiscursivity* (regarded as the conventions, the style and the register which make of a certain text a specific kind of text) become particularly relevant. The third phase requires the analysis of discourse *as a social practice*. Considering

discourse as something that happens within and not outside of society in which it is produced and at the same time (re-)produces structures of dominance, in this last stage the analyst is required to highlight the relationship emerging from the text between language use and social framework.

The overall methodological guidelines proposed by Fairclough (1992) are certainly of huge interest. Nevertheless, his approach to the critical analysis of discourse, as I explained above, is far from being the only one developed within the discipline and it should be noted that while CDA is associated with a very careful linguistic analysis of discourse, one of the main critiques aimed at scholars working within this tradition has to do with their general disinterest toward context and the role it has in the construction of meaning. Thus, drawing on the work of Blommaert³⁷ (2005), I will next introduce a set of useful concepts that have been used in this book to integrate the basic parameters of CDA with a more context-based approach to discourse.

3.7.1 CONTEXTUALIZING IDENTITIES

Blommaert's (2005) exploration of the relationship existing between discourse and context(s) is particularly fruitful for my investigation of the Turkish American case and for this reason I decided to dedicate his work a separate section. Before going any further into discussing this relationship, however, I would like to introduce his notion of identity:

Summarizing, by taking this position in which we see identities as forms of semiotic potential, we avoid the reduction of identities to static, established categories that are in themselves, in all likelihood, discourses of identities produced by particular actors. [...] If identity is a semiotic construct, it should be seen in the same terms of semiosis: as organized by topic, situation, genre, style, occasion, purpose, and so on. Such means, however, are ordered in stratified repertoires, and the suggestion of identities as semiotically organized does not entail a chaotic and unrestricted world of identifying

³⁷ Defining Blommaert's approach is mostly a matter of perspective. Blommaert, in fact, cannot — but also can (see Wodak, and Meyer, 2001) — be considered as an exponent of what is usually regarded as "CDA". It can be observed, therefore, that the concepts and guidelines below might have been presented without introducing Critical Discourse Analysis. On the one hand I partially agree with this position; Blommaert, in fact, severely criticizes CDA, claiming that its "very "linguistic" outlook [...] prevents productive ways of incorporating linguistic and nonlinguistic dimensions of semiosis" (Blommaert, and Bucholtz, 2000: 461). Despite his criticism, however, on the other hand it can also be observed that Blommaert, with his book *Discourse* (2005), developing a more contextual approach to the critical analysis of discourse, seems to present himself as someone working within and not outside the path of CDA. On the basis of this last consideration, thus, I decided to present a general outlook of this theoretical and methodological paradigm.

practices [...] Identities, like the semiotic resources by means of which they are enacted³⁸, are part of a stratified system, and the particular stratification of identities and their resources will depend on the particular environment in which one lives. (Blommaert, 2005: 210-1)

The similarities between Hall and Blommaert are quite clear when comparing the passage above with Hall's approach introduced earlier in this chapter. Both scholars, in view of the problems that essentialism has raised in the current conjuncture, begin their reflections from the basic assumption that identities can no longer be considered as something fixed and self-enclosed. In quite a similar way, Hall and Blommaert adopt a dynamic approach to the issue, considering identities as continuous and contextual processes through which meaning is constantly (re-)created.

Blommaert, however, focuses much more on the importance of context and on its relationship with the semiotic resources and in this respect, his reflection on what can be defined as Hall's "positionality" is much more detailed and structured. In his theory, identities, as semiotic practices, are clearly determined by the interplay between discourse and context and also the latter becomes an object of critique (Blommaert, 2005: 39). Context, in fact, plays a fundamental role in determining how people understand and participate during interactions and build identities. With whom we speak as well as where we talk or what is happening around us is not indifferent for the way meaning is given and created. Potentially everything, however, can be considered to be part of the context: from micro to macro conditions, everything might actually play an important role during the process through which meanings — and identities — are constructed. In the following pages I would like to focus on this complexity by introducing the concepts upon which I relied for contextualizing my analysis.

3.7.2 THE WORK OF CONTEXTUALIZATION: FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Blommaert, exploring the notion of "context", points at a collection of notions which are fundamental to the work of contextualization carried out by the analyst. Firstly, drawing on

³⁸ Today there is a broad general agreement upon the notion of "*performativity*". Judith Butler was among the first to define this concept in relation to identities. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), questioning the approach developed by feminist theory toward the definition of "women" as a homogenous and universal group sharing a set of common characteristics as opposed to the ones of "men", she claims that the definition of sexual and gender identities is strictly connected to the historical, cultural and social context within which those are developed. People, instead of "having" a gender or a sex, rather "perform", impersonate and enact certain genders or sexes. Identity, more generally, thus, in Butler's theory is configured as a performance that people do in specific contexts rather than as a universal and fixed quality.

Gumperz (1992), he introduces the concept of *indexicality*. People, he explains, during interactions often “pick up quite a few unsaid meanings” — which he refers to in terms of *indexical meanings* — that open a connection between language and “social and cultural patterns” (Blommaert, 2005: 41). To better understand indexicality it might be useful to give a brief overview on language and the relation between thoughts and representations. Thinking is an activity that necessarily requires people to form representations of things in their minds and to build a system of mental concepts through which reality can be conceived and explained. Language, then, can be defined as a system of representations through which mental concepts are connected to visual, written or spoken signs in order to allow communication. Those meanings are usually referred to as *referential*. Besides this first kind of meaning, however, during communication other social meanings also occur that connect “what is said and the social occasion in which it is produced” (Blommaert, 2005: 11). For instance, the word “sir”, explains Blommaert, may not only refer to a male subject, but it also often indexes a certain degree of politeness and deference that on its turn signals a certain relationship between the speakers; a relationship that would be very different if other words such as “man” or “bro” were used. The choice of using specific utterances, therefore, can be extremely revealing regarding who we are and how we are positioned in society. Indexicality, as social meaning, can signal, furthermore, where or on which occasion the discourse is taking place and whether social conventions within that specific context have been broken or not. Thus, indexicals can also signal if people are trying to reinforce or renegotiate their social roles. Discursive choices, then, may provide important information about the micro and macro contexts within which language users position themselves as social subjects.

A second important consideration made by Blommaert has to do with the fact that “context and contextualization are dialogical phenomena” (2005: 43). People give meaning to discourses in relation to the specific context within which they are created. At the same time these contexts, however, are not just given by the one making a statement, but also by whoever interprets it, or performs what Blommaert refers to as *uptake*. In the specific case of this study, Turkish Americanness, therefore, is not just determined by the voices —I will return to this concept below — uttering discourses about Turkish American identity, but also by my contextualization of the universe — since I, as the analyst, perform the uptake — that can be defined as a complex set of skills and knowledge that direct my understanding of the message. This, in the second instance, relates also to the issue of *reflexivity*. In a study such as this one, the way identities are constructed does not only relate to the specific position that

the self has in relation to a broader cultural, historical and social context, but it also depends to a huge degree on the particular contextualization universe that the analyst has access to in the collection and analysis of data. As every definition of Turkish Americanness surfacing in the following chapters reflects the particular position of persons interacting within a certain context (or contexts), at the same time, it is also true, therefore, that each of those definitions will also strongly depend on my particular interpretation. Every definition, in fact, will be the outcome also of my own position in relation to a variety of different discourses among which the object of this study is just one. Looking at this research from a broad perspective it is, however, difficult to explain in a straightforward manner how exactly my background conditioned my observations. On the one hand, certainly being familiar especially with the overall Turkish and Turkic context and coming from the broader area of Islamic studies brought me to focus on aspects that might have been less relevant for people working, for instance, in American studies. At the same time, furthermore, also having spent the last four years in two countries (Germany and the Netherlands) where, unlike in Italy and the US, the number of unskilled Turkish migrants is very high, probably gave me a completely different perspective over certain issues and put me in a very particular position, for instance, during my fieldwork. More than giving meaning to my work in respect to just one of these factors, however, I would rather claim that this study is the outcome of a broader positioning that entails the theoretical and methodological background adopted to my personal history.

During my research, another feature I tried to take into account is directly related to the local as well as translocal character of my data. If, on one hand, the context is given by the specific event within which a discourse takes place, on the other hand, context, in fact, is embedded into a broader dimension constituted by all the discourses produced within different contexts. Or, using Blommaert's words, it can be claimed that "a lot of what we perform in the way of meaning-attributing practices is the post-hoc re-contextualization of earlier bits of text that were produced, of course, in a different contextualization process, at a different time, by different people and for different purposes" (2005: 46). This process, Blommaert explains (2005), is particularly clear in the field of literacy³⁹: every time, for instance, that we read a book, we operate a re-contextualization of what is written in the book within our interpretation universe, keeping at the same time in account previous interpretations of the same literate text. The translocal character of contextualization, however, is not just a feature

limited to literacy but processes similar to the one just described take place in all fields of communication, and concepts such as *intertextuality* and *entextualisation* address this issue quite clearly. They link, in fact, a text to meanings that are constituted outside the texts within other discourses (Blommaert, 2005). These concepts are not only fundamental for a better understanding of the complexity of the relationship between context and meanings, but they also offer two fundamental tools for framing discourses within broader social, cultural, and political contexts.

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin introduces the term *heteroglossia* in order to point at the “primacy of context over text” (428) and claims that the set of conditions under which an utterance takes place is fundamental for determining its meaning. This initial condition is at the very basis of what he defines as “*dialogism*”, which can be described as the constant interconnectedness of meanings. Or, in other words, dialogism can be regarded as the potentiality that meanings have to influence each other across different contexts. Utterances, therefore, paraphrasing Bakhtin, acquire meaning as if they were on the boundary between their own context (the one of the speaker) and other alien contexts which correspond to the ones of those involved in the communication act (1981: 284).

Bakhtin’s work on dialogism can certainly be considered to be strictly related to the notion of “intertextuality”, first introduced by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. Intertextuality can be basically regarded as a non-optional quality of texts and discourses; the concept is based on the assumption that texts and discourses do not exist as autonomous and closed meaning systems but that they always entail a combination of multiple interrelated voices existing and operating also outside the local event within which they take place. To put it in a different way, everything people say is necessarily related to what others have said before them. Their words, thus, do not only have a local meaning that is circumscribed to a specific context, but they also carry with them other diachronic as well as synchronic meanings connected to the tradition of use of certain utterances. In Blommaert’s words, “in its simplest form, intertextuality refers to the fact that whenever we speak we produce the words of others, we constantly cite and re-cite expressions, and recycle meanings that are already available. Thus every utterance has a history of (ab)use, interpretation, and evaluation, and this history sticks to the utterance” (2005: 46). In this regard many of the choices people make while talking and

³⁹ In *Discourse* literacy is defined by Blommaert as: “the complex of practices related to the production, circulation, and reception of literate texts. Literacy is not conterminous with ‘writing’, but also involves multimodal communication modes (e.g. internet or mass media literacy)” (2005: 254).

their relevance to positioning them within certain social groups can be explained. It accounts, for instance, for why among secular Turks the greeting “Merhaba” is usually preferred to “Selamün aleiküm”. Even if both the expressions derive from Arabic and are commonly used during informal conversations, the latter also entails a religious meaning that traces back more than a thousand years of use and is also linked to a language variety especially common among Turkish religious conservatives.

Entextualisation is another important concept for understanding the translocal character of discourses and can be basically defined as the process through which a text is at first decontextualized from its original context to be consequently recontextualised within a completely new one. Or, in other words:

Entextualisation refers to the process by means of which discourses are successively or simultaneously decontextualized and metadiscursively recontextualised, so that they become a new discourse associated to a new context and accompanied by a particular metadiscourse which provides a sort of ‘preferred reading’ for the discourse. (Blommaert, 2005: 47)

This is exactly what happens with direct quotations in texts, for instance. In this study, the workings of entextualization can be observed quite clearly in Chapter 4 in the analysis of the website of the Turkish American Islamic Institute: there, parts of various religious texts, removed from their original context to be re-positioned within the homepage of TAIL, contribute to the creation of a completely new meaning, still bringing with them a connection with the context within which they were initially produced. It can be claimed, thus, that entextualization adds a new context to the discourse, which, besides its event of production — for instance TAIL’s website — acquires meaning also in relation to a metadiscursive context — in this case, for instance the Qur’an, the Hadith and other religious texts — which suggests a “preferred reading”.

3.7.3 THE WORK OF CONTEXTUALIZATION: ADDITIONAL CONCEPTS

Aside for the concepts discussed above, Blommaert also draws the attention of his readers to “hidden” or much less visible contexts that still play a fundamental role in connecting discourse to social structure. Among those contexts, for the purposes of this study, the most important one can certainly be considered to be given by what Blommaert (2005) refers to as *resources*. Resources can be generally defined as the set of linguistic means and

communicative skills that people possess for understanding others and for making themselves understood. Not everyone relies on the same resources, and when we engage in communication our interpretations as well as our discourses are strictly connected to the styles, codes, and language varieties we are able to master (Blommaert, 2005: 58). Language, in fact, is not exactly a homogeneous system but on the contrary, presents a “complex and layered collection” of varieties that can be classified according to a number of criteria such as channel, domain, style or geographical and social origin of the language user (Blommaert, 2005: 10). People thus are not completely free to say whatever they want, but they can rather try to express themselves within the possibilities that their resources allow them to. Anyone used to travelling or living abroad, for instance, probably knows very well that “speaking a language” does not automatically allow people to communicate effectively in every circumstance. While one’s linguistic resources in a second language might be perfect, for instance, for buying food and engaging in everyday conversations, the same repertoire might be absolutely inadequate when this person needs to discuss the details of a job contract with her/his employer or her/his health with a doctor. Communication, in such cases, may be incredibly frustrating. To have a *voice*, conceptualized here as the ability one has to make her/himself understood, is not always a given fact but strictly depends on the resources upon which people rely for communicating (Blommaert, 2005: 68). This also holds for the ability that people have to accomplish desired functions using their “own” language. Linguistic resources, in fact, are not equally distributed in society and highly specialized jargons (for instance the legal, the medical, or the political ones) are actually accessible only to a small minority. As Blommaert points out, “what can be told depends on how one can tell it” and what people can do with language is strongly connected to the specific position they have within society (2005: 60). Any difference in the use of language, as well as the (im)possibility to be understood within a specific context, thus, can actually be regarded as a difference of accessibility; not everyone has access to the same resources. An analysis of the resources, and consequently of voice, can therefore be used to draw relevant connections between texts and society at large. Or, to use Blommaert’s words:

[...] what we call “meaning” in communication is something which is, on the one hand, produced by a speaker/writer, but still has to be granted by someone else. This can be done co-operatively and on the basis of sharedness and equality, but it need not, it can also be done by force, unilaterally, as an act of power and an expression of inequality. The concept of voice [...] is all about that: it is about the capacity to cause an uptake close enough to one’s desired contextualization. What people do with words [...] is to produce

conditions for uptake, conditions for voice, but as soon as these conditions are produced, uptake is a fully social process, full of power and inequality. Consequently, context is not just something we can just “add” to text — it is text, it defines its meanings and conditions of use. (Blommaert, 2005: 45)

As the attribution of identity categories is a dialogical practice, similar observations can be clearly made also for identities. Who we are has to do on the one hand with the semiotic resources we are able and willing to use in order to enact our identity, but on the other it also depends on the repertoires of the people interpreting our performances. Certain meanings and certain identities, to be recognized — or to produce an uptake close enough to the subject’s desire — in fact need a certain degree of specialization or at least a certain familiarity with specific discourses. Some identities, thus, not only are not accessible to everyone, but also cannot even be recognized by everyone. And the case of Turkish Americans, in this respect, is quite meaningful. Most Americans would probably be unable to interpret the Turkish symbols worn by some of my informants as they would not be recognize and be able to differentiate secular from religiously conservative performances, and Armenian Americans, for instance, would probably have a very specific way of interpreting and categorizing some of the semiotic practices of Turkish American secular groups. This, however, is not just a peculiarity of the Turkish American situation but is quite a common phenomenon. In the recent decades, globalization has substantially contributed to the circulation and relocation of a huge number of people whose identity repertoires and performances in different social environments may have become less clear to the ones involved in the process of categorization. As I mentioned above, the further the distance —not only a spatial distance but a more abstract one— the more general categories become (Blommaert, 2005).

Going back to the “less obvious” contexts discussed by Blommaert, another notion relevant in the analysis of discourses has to do with what he refers to as *text trajectories*, meaning the “patterns of shifting and transferring bits of discourse through series of entextualisations” (2005: 255); as in the case, for instance, of summaries and notes. This process of shifting parts of discourse through different contexts, he observes, necessarily entails considerations of power structures. To better understand Blommaert’s reasoning it might be helpful to briefly reconsider some of what has been suggested so far. Summaries, notes, and reports are all practices through which parts of discourses get decontextualized and recontextualised in a different context. Contexts, however, are not freely accessible to everyone but generally

people, as was pointed out, may have access only to those contexts that their social and cultural position allows them. To access a specific context, we necessarily need to master the specific resources required by that particular environment. It is in view of these considerations, thus, that, according to Blommaert, recontextualization might raise questions of power (2005: 62). He observes that entextualization practices, the shifting of a text through various contexts, may require a certain degree of specialization and this leads directly to the unequal access people may have to powerful resources. Therefore, entextualizations connect texts to a broader social context.

Finally, Blommaert also discusses the importance of *data history* in shaping the way discourses are made and interpreted. He observes that the precise conditions, the place and the occasion on which data are collected and produced are not indifferent but actually have a huge influence on the data. Why someone says something at a certain moment or why the researcher looks for something on a precise occasion are fundamental aspects that should be taken into account. Even if the importance of these details is quite evident in itself, Critical Discourse Analysis does not always take into account the “situatedness” of the data (Blommaert, 2005: 64). Nevertheless, certain issues may be investigated only at a certain moment and, similarly, certain data may be produced only under specific conditions. To give a practical example from the data collection for the present study, when I arrived in Washington D.C. for my fieldwork, Rick Perry, a candidate in the US presidential elections in 2012, had publicly stated that Turkey was ruled by an Islamic terrorist and that the country should not be part of NATO. Now, that certainly influenced what my interviewees and I decided to discuss and to focus on. Most of them, for instance, expressed their disappointment in this regard, and some also insisted on the differences between secular and non-secular Turkish American groups in the US; a topic that is certainly very important but that acquired even more relevance as a consequence of the particular event reported above. A similar consideration can also be made concerning the Armenian issue⁴⁰. Without taking any kind of position in this regard, it can be stated that the topic, for certain groups of Turkish Americans

⁴⁰ The so called “Armenian Genocide” is quite a sensitive topic to discuss and here it is not my intention to fully cover this issue. For the purposes of this study it will be enough to give my readers some essential information to better understand my reasoning. At the risk of simplifying too much, it could be argued that the issue is mainly one of definition. Armenians claim that between 1915 and 1916 about at least 500.000 Armenians have been deported and killed under the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish government, however, always denied these allegations, arguing that given the circumstances the use of the word “genocide” is inappropriate and that the Armenians killed were actually enemies. Today many countries such as France, Italy, The Netherlands, Venezuela, and Belgium have officially recognized those events as “genocide”. Since in the US no decision has been made on the issue, however, within this study I refer to those events in a hypothetical form (for more information on the topic see for instance Suny, Göçek, and Naimark, 2011)

especially, is particularly relevant at the moment, in view both of the positions that many European governments have already taken on this delicate issue, as well as of the fact that in the US the House and the Senate have been recently called to decide on the matter. These and similar events that I will discuss in more detail in the next chapters have certainly produced at least two main effects on this study. Firstly, I would claim that some issues, such as the ones discussed above, became extremely visible in the discourses by many Turkish Americans. In a second instance, I also focused on those topics as they were particularly timely. Today however, with a fresh “peace” declaration of the PKK (*Kurdistan Workers Party*) signed by Öcalan to put an end to the attacks against Turkey, I do not doubt that the data, as well as my focus, would be considerably different⁴¹.

3.8 OVERALL METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE USE OF DIFFERENT SOURCES

A research question can be answered from different perspectives, and different data, methodologies and theories may produce very different answers to the same question. While some may see this as a problem, a far more fruitful position is to embrace the benefits of applying multiple perspectives. While arriving at conclusions based on diverse materials seems like a challenging task, this is exactly what this study aims at; by analyzing different ways in which Turkish Americanness is constructed, this book wants to draw a picture of the complexity of the Turkish American experience and the use of different types of data is extremely relevant to this end.

The strategy of employing data collected from multiple sources, through multiple methods and — in other cases — by multiple observers or through multiple theories (see Denzin, 1970) for understanding the same social phenomenon, is not new to disciplines such as social studies or ethnography. On the contrary, this practice, which takes the name of triangulation, is often employed by researchers engaged in qualitative studies with the aim of double-checking their findings, supporting their analysis with other data that substantially agree with — or do not contradict — them. Triangulation, thus, can be regarded as a strategy for increasing the validity of a study — where validity means the credibility or defensibility (see Johnson, 1997: 282) of an interpretation. This is also why I decided to bring in different types of data – e.g. an interview in Chapter 4 in addition to online data, and my informants’ reactions to my work in Chapter 5 – to support my interpretations. As Mathison (1988)

⁴¹ The PKK is an armed political organization who fight/fought the Turkish government for the autonomy of Turkish Kurdistan (a region in the south-eastern area of the country). On March 21st 2013, Öcalan, the jailed

observes, however, it is often assumed that the result of such triangulation is “the truth” about an issue and that therefore there can be only one perspective on social phenomena (14). Such a position is highly problematic. If we consider identities as semiotic practices in which meaning is strictly related to the context(s) within which they take place, it is not possible to talk about a fixed and self-enclosed Turkish Americanness but the issue is absolutely positional. On the one hand, thus, if confronting data collected from multiple sources and through multiple methods enhances the credibility of an analysis, on the other hand it should also be pointed out that there is not just one way of conceiving Turkish Americanness, but rather a potentially infinite number of ways. Each different way of conceiving identity, each different discourse, however, is not just another “variety of identity” but it is rather the result of and, at the same time reflects, the position within society that the ones involved in the process of communication and observation have at that time.

Looking at triangulation from this perspective, its outcome should not necessarily be a convergence, an agreement, or a single statement on diverse types of data gathered in diverse contexts and situations. The value of data triangulation and its relevance is also in showing inconsistencies, contrasts, disagreements; in making explicit a complexity that otherwise would not have been expressed. In this specific case, therefore, observing different discourses about the same identity label (or the meaning this label acquires within different contexts) is a strategy that serves to enhance our understanding of the Turkish American situation.

leader of the organization, called for a ceasefire and the opening of a new phase in the Kurdish struggle. For more details on these developments see for instance Hayatsever, 2013; “Öcalan Calls for Cease-fire”.

CHAPTER 4

IDENTITY DISCOURSES IN CYBERSPACE

THE MAKING OF TURKISH AMERICANNESSTHROUGH THE DISCOURSES OF ATAA AND TAI

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Turkish migration to the United States, as I explained in Chapter 1, has not been given much attention in the academia. While it is of great interest especially in view of its deviation from the European picture, until the 1980s Turkish migration to the US remained quite a small phenomenon, involving privileged groups such as intellectuals, students and professionals who rapidly assimilated into the American mainstream. In recent decades the situation has started to change with the arrival of a considerable number of unskilled and illegal workers⁴². The Turkish presence in the US has not, however, reached the huge numbers of Europe and today the total number of Turkish Americans has been estimated to be between 200.000 and 500.000 people (Saatci, 2008; Kaya, 2009). As the huge differences in the estimates regarding the number of Turkish Americans suggests, however, defining the label is not an easy task — and, if we consider identities as dynamic semiotic practices, giving an exhaustive definition is not even possible. Identities as discursive practices are subject to continuous changes and their meaning is continuously redefined according to the position that the subject and the observer have in relation to the context (see Chapter 3). Throughout the years, changing migration patterns, transnationality, deterritorialization of the nation-state and of citizenship, the birth of second and third generations and the invention of new communication technologies have made the Turkish American experience even more complex. The study of identity discourses circulating in the public sphere — here considered as “the virtual space [...] where information, ideas and debates can circulate in society, and where political opinions can be formed” (McKee, 2005: 4) — can thus be regarded as particularly relevant especially when “outdated” labels or new categories are approached. The aim of this chapter

⁴² For further readings about Turkish migration to the United States see: Akçapar (2006); Di Carlo (2008); Karpat (2008); Kaya (2004; 2007; 2009).

is to investigate the making of Turkish Americanness by focusing on the discourses produced by Turkish American groups actively operating in the public sphere, namely the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA), and the Turkish American Islamic Institute (TAII). Considering the importance that the internet has today for acquiring and sharing information, for exchanging opinions, performing identities, as well as for challenging others' points of view, I decided to focus on the discourses of these two groups on the Web.

4.2 THE CYBERSPACE AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

There is no consensus among scholars on the way the cyberspace should be conceived. Some have claimed that the Internet can hardly be considered as a public sphere as for now it seems to lack some fundamental features that are at the very basis of this notion (e.g. Papacharissi, 2002). To better understand their position, it is useful to take a step back and briefly consider the definition of "public sphere", starting from the one given by Habermas:

With "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public interest can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. [...] Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion — that is with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere [...]. (Habermas, 1974: 49)

From Habermas' perspective, "accessibility", "unrestrictedness" and "public interest" are the main characteristics of the public sphere. The cyberspace, however, is not solely a public but also a private space (Papacharissi, 2002: 20). Furthermore, the web is far from being the democratic locus it is often supposed to be: despite its potentialities, there is no equal access to online sources and debates; dialogues are often restricted (people can be banned from access to certain sites, for instance) and all netizens do not really have the same opportunity to make their voices heard (Papacharissi, 2002). Furthermore, information is often passively and uncritically absorbed by internet users and online engagement does not necessarily correspond to factual engagement offline (McKee, 2005: 196-202). Papacharissi thus observes that the Web can be considered a public *space* rather than a public *sphere*. In her words:

[...] the internet and related technologies have managed to create new public space for political discussion. This public space facilitates, but does not ensure, the rejuvenation of a

culturally drained public sphere. Cheap, fast, and convenient access to more information does not necessarily render all citizens more informed, or more willing to participate in political discussion. Greater participation in political discussion helps, but does not ensure a healthier democracy. New technologies facilitate greater, but not necessarily more diverse, participation in political discussion since they are still only available to a small fraction of the population. In addition, our diverse and heterogeneous cultural backgrounds make it difficult to recreate a unified public sphere, on or offline. (Papacharissi, 2002: 22)

As Papacharissi suggests, the issue, however, is not so much if the internet can be considered a public sphere but rather if today it is still possible to talk about a public sphere (or public spheres) at all, at least from Habermas' utopian perspective. That is mainly an issue of definition: changing perspective, the cyberspace can, in fact, be regarded as a public sphere as it provides an arena for political and cultural discussion; it is a composite and multilayered context where meanings are constantly negotiated among a potentially huge community of diverse users who interact in different manners and establish new norms and repertoires by creating, commenting on, liking and surfing multimedia artifacts (e.g. websites, blogs, personal profiles), chatting, playing, buying and selling or using and offering different services (e.g. e-banking, films and book subscriptions, phone calls, online software). Furthermore, as regards the focus of this study, the internet can be considered a space of interaction where people can create and discuss identities, share specific representations of the self, shape their understanding of reality and eventually contribute — even if to different extents — to the one of the others; its relevance, thus, is fundamental when investigating society(ies) (Hine, 2005; Boellstorff, Nardi, et al., 2012).

Personal pages, blogs or, as in the case of this study, websites of associations, can be considered *mutable artifacts*⁴³ through which social actors continuously perform their identities by sharing discourses about who they are, who the Others are and how they conceive reality. Consequently, an analysis of online discourses is undoubtedly beneficial for the purposes of this study. Exploring different possibilities of giving meaning to the Turkish American experience, this chapter provides an insight into the complex set of relations and circumstances under which Turkish Americanness is created and performed on the Web by two associations which have a specific position online as well as offline.

⁴³ It should be noted that in this study the word "artifact" is not another way for saying "product". By using it I rather want to point at the constitutive aspect of something that is both constructing and constructed by society (for more on this see Hine, 1998). In the case of online artifacts I would like to point in particular at the extreme mutability of their shape and contents through time.

Before going further to present the outcome of this work, I would first like to introduce some methodological considerations that will be useful to better frame this study.

4.3. SELECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The selection of the analyzed websites is based upon their visibility and popularity on the Web and the diversity of their positions. Popularity and visibility have been determined using Google and typing in “Turkish American” as a keyword, setting the US as location and depersonalizing the search results with the add-on Google Global⁴⁴. In the Google search, the English language has been preferred to Turkish for visibility reasons, as any website in only Turkish would have been accessible only to Turkish speakers and not to a wider English-speaking public. This specific framing automatically excluded from the selection all the websites whose contents were mainly published in Turkish, and therefore the webpage of the Federation of Turkish American Associations (FTAA), the first Turkish American umbrella organization founded in the US, has not been taken into consideration.

As can be seen from Table 1, Turkish American associations are strongly connected through affiliations to bigger organizations. On the secular side, the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) and the Federation of Turkish American Associations (FTAA) represent the main Turkish American umbrella associations and besides organizing and leading several activities together — for instance protests against H.Res.306⁴⁵, and the Turkish company *Biomen*⁴⁶ — they also share a certain amount of members (e.g. the *Florida Turkish American Association*, the *Turkish Society of Rochester*, and the *Turkish American Association of Northern Texas*). Both the associations, furthermore, in 2011 have been funded by the *Turkish Coalition of America*, an organization aiming at fostering a better understanding of Turkish issues in the US and at promoting the interests of Turks and Turkish Americans (“Annual Report”: 12). While ATAA, however, addresses an English-speaking public, counts among its members a business association (the *Turkish American Business Association*) and publishes a newspaper⁴⁷, FTAA mainly addresses Turkish speakers and seems to have no explicit

⁴⁴ Google ranks its results on the basis of complex algorithms. Among those, *PageRank* counts the number of quality links to a given website determining its visibility and popularity. At the same time, Google’s results are also personalized on the basis of user preferences. Websites that score higher in an un-personalized search are very likely to be more visible and popular than others.

⁴⁵ A House resolution accusing Turkey of destroying its Christian heritage.

⁴⁶ The company used a video from one of Hitler’s speeches to advertise a men’s shampoo. The advertisement can be watched on the website of the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Strittmatter, 2012).

⁴⁷ Roberta Micallef (2004) mentioned that ATAA publishes *The Turkish Times* (234). It is not clear, however, if the newspaper is still published by the association.

Main Turkish American Associations and Organizations					
TAA	ATAA	TADF/FTAA	Others		
<p>TAA Turkish American Alliance (Gülen Group); Ebru Tv; Today's Zaman; The Light, Inc</p> <p>Council of American Associations; Turkish Cultural Center; Turkish American Business Improvement; Universal Foundation & Development Council; Pennsylvania Dialogue Forum; Red Rose Foundation; Lehigh Dialogue Center; Interfaith Dialog Center; Milky Way Education Center</p> <p>Mid Atlantic Federation of Turkish American Associations; Society of American Turkish Academics; American Turkish Cultural Center; AICCR Richmond; American Turkish Friendship Association; DATEF; Divan Center; Azerbaijan American Cultural Association; Turkuz; Rumi Forum; Prospect Foundation; Marti; Eurasian American Cultural Center; The Institute of Islamic and Turkish Studies</p> <p>Turkish American Federation of Midwest; Niagara Foundation; Islamic Society of Chicago; Turkish American Chamber of Commerce; Ahiska Turks Cultural Center; Kyrgyz American Association; Turkmen American Student Organization; Turkish American Academics of Midwest; Turkish American Society; Bosnian American Great Lakes Society of Friendship and Culture; Tajik American Association; Societo Educational Foundation; Madison Turkish American Culture Center</p> <p>Turkish American Federation of South East; Istanbul Center; Turkish Cultural Center(s); Anatolia Cultural Center; Peace Valley; Society of Universal Dialogue; Turkish American Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>West America Turkic Council; The Northwest Turkish - American Chamber of Commerce; Sema Foundation; foundation for Intercultural Dialogue; Tolerance Foundation; CaTA Chamber; BAYCC; CO-TA; Multicultural Mosaic Foundation; Pacifica Institute; Sierra Foundation; Rosegarden; Acacia</p> <p>Turquoise Council of Americans and Eurasians; Raindrop Turkish House; Texas Turkish American Chamber of Commerce; The Institute of Interfaith Dialog</p>	<p>ATAA Assembly of Turkish American Associations; The Turkish Times</p> <p>S. N. England Turkish American Cultural Association, Inc; Florida Turkish American Association; Turkish American Cultural Association of Georgia; Turkish American Friendship Assoc. of Hawaii; Turkish American Cultural Alliance of Chicago; Istanbul University Alumni Association of USA; The Society of Turkish American Architects, Engineers and Scientists; Turkish Women's League of America; Turkish Society of Rochester; Turkish American Association of Northern Texas</p> <p>Turkish American Association of Alabama; Friends of Turkey in Arkansas; Association of Turkish Americans of S. California; Turkish American Association of California; North Florida Turkish American Cultural Association; Turkish American Association for Cultural Exchange; American Turkish Association of Indiana; Maryland American Turkish Association of Michigan; Turkish American Association of Minnesota; Azerbaijan Society of America; Turkish American Association of Central Ohio; Turkish American Friendship Society of the United States; American Turkish Association of San Antonio; American Turkish Association of Houston; Turkish American Association of San Antonio; American Turkish Association of Washington; American Turkish Association of Washington; Turkish American Business Association</p> <p>Business associations</p> <p>*Association with no web site **Association probably connected to the Gülen Movement ***TCA in 2011 partially funded ATAA, TADF and AFT ****ATAA is one of ATC members</p>	<p>TADF/FTAA Türk American Dernekleri Federasyonu</p> <p>Okak Turkmen Cultural Association; American Association of Crimean Turks; Anadolu Club; ATA - Houston; Azerbaijan New York Association; Azerbaijan Society of America; Balkan Turks of America Association; Fenerbahce USA; Galatasaray USA; Istanbul Sports Cultural & Education Center; Karacay Turks Mosque and Culture; Mevlana Camii Association; Middle East Technical University Alumni; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk Turk American Derneği; Burlington County Muslim Association; Paterson Turkish American Society; Turkish American Cultural Association of Florida; Trabzonspor, USA; Turk Amerikan Giresunlular Derneği; Turkestanian American Association; Turkish American Muslim Culture Association; Turkish American Association of Louisiana; Turkish American Chamber of Restaurateurs; Turkish American Community Center; Turkish American Cultural Society of New England; Turkish American Eyp; Sultan Cultural Center; Turkish American Medical Association, Inc.; Turkish American Youth Association; Turkish Americans of Southern California; Turkish Children Foster Care; Turkish Cultural Alliance Inc; Turkish Cypriot Aid Society of New York; Turkish Cypriot Cultural and Educational Association; Turkocagi, Inc.; Muslim Association of NY (Fatih Camii); Young Turks Cultural Aid Society</p>	<p>The American Turkish Society</p> <p>Cosmos Foundation of Georgia; Turkish American Islamic Institute; Turkish American Islamic Center of Florida**</p> <p>Turkish American Chamber of Commerce and Industry</p> <p>Turkish American Scientists and Scholars Association</p> <p>Turkish Coalition of America*** Turkish American Legal Defense Fund Turkish Cultural Foundation American Friends of Turkey</p> <p>American Turkish Council (partner with American Friends of Turkey and DEIK)****</p> <p>Turkish American Business Association American Chamber of Commerce in Turkey</p>		

Table 1: "The Main Turkish American Associations and Organizations". May 2012. The chart has been compiled using information available on the websites of the listed associations. The choice of including TAA, which from a certain point of view can be considered more as a Turkic than Turkish-oriented association, is mostly due to the fact that many of its member associations are Turkish American organizations or promote what has been defined as a Turkish variety of Islam (see Yavuz, and Esposito, 2003). It is quite interesting to note how the Turkish American experience, both within a secular as well as within a more religiously conservative context, goes hand in hand with discourses about Turkicness.

connections with business organizations. On the “moderately religious”⁴⁸ side, then, the Gülen group with the *Turkic American Alliance* (TAA) is the main organization on the Turkish/Turkic⁴⁹ American scene. It is divided into six smaller federations organized by geographical areas, and counts a significant number of business organizations as well as publications. As in the case of ATAA, the main and only language of TAA is English.

It is reasonable to claim that at a macro level similar discourses and narratives are shared within each confederation of associations. This study, however, focuses on the analysis of the websites of two specific organizations and, despite eventual similarities between the two, I would be careful in extending my observations to other associations. Below, I want to highlight the gap between their positions. Future studies on other associations, while beyond the scope of the present study, will be very relevant to further explore perspectives and possible diversities also within partner organizations.

In the following, the gap between “moderately religious” and secular positions and its effects on the making of Turkish American identity will be explored through a multimodal analysis of the websites of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) and of the Turkish American Islamic Institute (TAII), that, on the gülenist side, seems to be much more visible than the respective umbrella association — TAA — as a result of its focus on Turkish rather than on Turkic identity. This means, therefore, that my work will take into account websites in their entirety, considering as meaningful not only texts but also other modes of semiosis, i.e. for instance images, sounds, colors, the position of various elements on the website, and the use of explicitly intertextual features (links).

Other relevant methodological considerations that should be made as regards the analysis of these websites deal with the preparation of the research as well as with data collection. First of all, as is also the case with research offline, at a preliminary stage it is important to “get ready”. This means that collecting information about and observing the online context(s) within which discourse is situated is fundamental and often this may require several hours of

⁴⁸ My choice of using inverted commas is due to the controversial position of the Gülen group. On the one hand, as I already mentioned above, the organization presents itself and its members as moderately Muslim, but on the other hand, the group has also been accused of assuming Islamist positions.

⁴⁹ The adjective “Turkish” usually refers to nationality and “Turkic” to ethnicity. “Turkic”, as adjective, is also generally used in linguistics in order to classify a set of languages mostly spoken in Central Asia, the South-Eastern Mediterranean and Siberia presenting a set of common features (see Menges, 1995). Turkic identities, however, are not solely a matter of language or ethnicity but today it can be observed that, according to the context, they consist of a set of different and always changing characteristics (e.g. religion, citizenship, heritage, political position, etc.).

surfing on different websites (see Boyd, forthcoming). As Bennett (2004), Kendall (2002), and Miller and Slater (2000) have observed, furthermore, there is a certain continuity between online and offline contexts, and investigating the Web also requires substantial knowledge of where certain discourses are located in the offline world. If, then, as in this case, the websites analyzed belong to associations which are active also offline, it is even more relevant to consider the organizations in their entirety — their history, their partners, their initiatives and eventually their board members. Moreover, analyzing online discourses also requires a certain familiarity with online conventions and, in certain cases, with specific language varieties which are used on the Web. An overall knowledge of the Web and of its norms, thus, is extremely important. A final consideration should be made about the mutability of online data: contents that are visible today may have disappeared in a few days' time, and for this reason it is necessary to keep records of the dates of access for each piece of data and, where relevant, take screenshots for evidence.

In each section I focus on a different case and my analysis always starts with some preliminary considerations about the name of the organization observed. The analysis mainly focuses on the homepages of the two organizations; the specific features analyzed, however, change from case to case as the two websites differ in the way they are put together. Particular attention is also given to the banners that ATAA and TAI were using on their websites between November 2011 and June 2012⁵⁰. To conclude, while the analysis of TAI's discourse is exclusively based on online data⁵¹, in the case of ATAA I have also conducted an interview with one of its former presidents in Washington DC on January 17th, 2011.

4.4 THE ASSEMBLY OF TURKISH AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS⁵²

ATAA is a heritage association that was founded in 1979 and today can be considered one of the largest Turkish American umbrella associations on US soil⁵³. Its main purpose is to pursue the interests of the Turkish American community, empower Turkish Americans, inform society about issues related to them, and strengthen Turkish American relations (Figure 3 and Kirlikovali, "Become"). To these ends, the Assembly — also through its local chapters —

⁵⁰ The website of TAI has been offline for some weeks during this period.

⁵¹ Despite my attempts TAI never answered my emails or calls.

⁵² The copyrights of all the images presented after Figure 2 belong to the respective associations. The size and proportions of the images may have been slightly altered for readability.

⁵³ ATAA claims to be the largest Turkish American association on the US soil (Kirlikovali, "Become") but it is not clear whether this claim is based on the number of member associations (in which case, according to my interviewee, the former president of ATAA, TAA with its about 165 local chapters would be the largest), territorial reach or individual subscriptions.

ABOUT US

The ATAA, representing over 60 local chapters and 500,000 Turkish Americans throughout the United States, serves locally and nationwide to develop an informed and empowered Turkish American community, and to support strong U.S.-Turkish relations. The ATAA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed under the laws of the District of Columbia.

Figure 3: "Right sidebar/Homepage". ataa.org
n.a. Web 2 Feb 2012

organizes different cultural and educational activities, shares information to encourage its members to engage politically and civically, and tries to rebalance the image of Turks and Turkish Americans by providing alternative discourses to those circulating in the US and in the West in general about Turkish/Turkic-related issues.

As was explained in Chapter 2, the Turkish American experience presents a high level of complexity that makes it very difficult to make broad generalizations of any sort. Despite this diversity, however, at a textual level the Assembly presents itself as spokesperson for the totality of the Turkish American population throughout the United States⁵⁴(Figure 3).

It would be misleading, nevertheless, to view ATAA as a *super partes* organization with no specific political affiliations or a "neutral" approach to Turkish Americanness. The Assembly, in fact, is mainly a secular association and even though this is not explicit on a textual level (not, at least, in the main sections of its website), on an intertextual level this becomes quite clear.

Intertextuality, as was pointed out in Chapter 3, is a non-optional quality of texts. Meanings influence each other across different contexts and, since language use is not indifferent to language users, some interesting considerations can be made as regards the name — or better the acronym — that the association has chosen. On the one hand, ATAA, as a word made of four letters, is just one of the referents for the Assembly. Nevertheless, on the other hand it should be observed that in Turkish, ATAA actually sounds the same as *Ata* — a Turkic word meaning "father" — and the acronym through this intertextual reference picks up a second meaning that can be regarded as significant regarding the Assembly's all-embracing aims. People familiar with Turkish history will recall, furthermore, that the prefix "Ata" has also been used by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish republic, for forming his surname — i.e. "Father of the Turks" — and this intertextual reference can be regarded as meaningful for positioning the organization within the Turkish and Turkish American political framework. In addition, the parallelism between Atatürk and the organization also

⁵⁴ According to ATAA, the total number of Turkish Americans on the US soil is 500,000, including Turkic-speaking people from the Caucasus and Central Asia (Interview with former ATAA president, 17 Jan 2013).

makes the Assembly's leading aspirations very clear. As Atatürk was the father and the leader of modern Turkey, what ATAA seems to claim through its name, in fact, is that it can be the father and the leader of all Turkish Americans: an aspiration that, as we will see in more detail below, the Assembly clearly has. Already the name of the association, thus, points to an apparent ambiguity between ATAA's broad inclusivity and the implicit exclusivity that derives from its positioning within the Turkish American context.



Figure 4: "Banner". ataa.org n.a. Web 2 Feb 2012⁵⁵

Similar observations can be made regarding the banner of ATAA's website. A banner is one of the most important features of a webpage: it is generally the main and the most visible element on the top of the page in every section of the site and thanks to this element, internet surfers, if they have the necessary linguistic resources, can place the site they are visiting in a specific context. As we will see in the case of ATAA, the banner appropriates certain discourses through which the Assembly introduces itself and its "members" to its readers (Figure 4).

Starting from the left of the picture, the acronym ATAA followed by "Assembly of Turkish American Associations" colored in blue and red is written over the background, occupying almost one half of the picture. That is the biggest and the most important element of the banner, informing visitors as to whom the page belongs. Particularly interesting, here, however, is not the text of the banner in itself but rather its non-textual features, such as its chromatic choices and background. The colors used are a clear reference to the American (white-red-blue) and Turkish (white-red) flags. Through these intertextual details, the Association presents itself once more as "Turkish American": a fusion of Turkishness and Americanness that seems to support a hybrid perspective on identity. Such a view also emerges analyzing the background where the prints of the Turkish and the American flag merge into each other and create a single pattern, maintaining at the same time a certain

Furthermore, throughout its website (as for instance in Kirlikovali, "Become"), ATAA at a textual level always refer to a generic "Turkish American community" without making any distinctions within this population.

⁵⁵ In May 2013 this banner has been removed and replaced with a different one (see Appendix 1). As often is the case when analyzing online data, the content of the website has been modified since I started my analysis.

degree of separateness that at a textual level is stressed also by the hyphen — the only one on the homepage — dividing the words “Turkish” and “American” on the top of the banner⁵⁶. Despite signaling a difference between Turkishness and Americanness, it should be observed, nevertheless, that the background, through its chromatic and figurative choices also establishes a point of contact among the two, presenting in this way the basis for a harmonic Turkish American experience — at least from a hybrid perspective.

Another interesting observation that can be made about the background of the banner regards the way the Turkish flag has been included. While the stars of the Turkish and the American flag are positioned next to each other, the Turkish crescent remains almost completely invisible on the very left of the picture, making it impossible for people who are not familiar with Turkish symbols to detect its presence. There are different interpretations of the meaning of the crescent in the Turkish flag but in this context — since the website addresses an international public — it should be considered that Westerners usually associate the crescent with Islam, and ATAA’s decision not to highlight it in its banner can be reasonably read as a sign of secularism. This hypothesis is also strengthened by many other elements, such as the name of the association but especially the picture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the extreme right of the banner; Atatürk, in fact, has been the prime mover of the exclusion of religion from the public sphere in Turkey and during his government he abolished the Caliphate, promoting a series of reforms aiming at modernizing and de-Islamizing the country⁵⁷.

On the right of the banner, immediately below the image of the first president of Turkey wearing a Western business-oriented suit and his signature, the Atatürk motto “Peace at home, peace on Earth” is entextualized in capital letters. Here, it is quite interesting to look at the text’s trajectory. The Turkish sentence “Yurtta sulh, cihanda sulh⁵⁸” was pronounced for the first time by Atatürk during a speech to the nation on April 20th, 1931 referring to the political program of The *Republican People’s Party* (CHP) and the quote has been re-used on several occasions with slightly different meanings depending on the specific context by CHP exponents, including its current leader Kılıçdaroğlu. The sentence, therefore, seems to have a

⁵⁶ Interestingly the hyphen does not appear anywhere else in the banner and has even been removed altogether in its new version (see Appendix 1).

⁵⁷ Atatürk promoted a “modern” version of Islam, stressing the importance of giving religion a private dimension rather than a public one.

⁵⁸ The sentence has different variants, for instance “Evde barış, dünyada barış” and “Yurtta barış, dünyada barış”.

distinctive purpose, positioning ATAA as a kemalist⁵⁹ association within the Turkish and Turkish American political framework; this was also confirmed by the former president of ATAA during my interview with him. More recently, the quote has been used also by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (an AKP⁶⁰ exponent) to describe the government's engagement "for the creation of an environment of sustainable peace, security and tranquility in the region and beyond" ("Synopsis of" and "Homepage"). In this context, thus, it can be observed that the use of Atatürk's words might also have a broader meaning that goes beyond the political positioning of the association.

As was explained in Chapter 2, the level of complexity within the Turkish American community is extremely high and, according to the former president of ATAA⁶¹. in my interview with him, already at the level of the currently existing Turkish American organizations, there are at least three different kinds of organizations that are extremely diverse in terms of their participants' backgrounds and lifestyles:

*Extract 1*⁶²

I can categorize three groups of Turkish Americans, in the fifties, there is the, engineers and scientists, positions in the United States, imported from Turkey. Whereas Germany imported workers, United States imported, scientists and professors and teachers and mmm and engineers and physicians, mmm these people, are today, retired, most living in Florida, in the winter months, and in Turkey on the Aegean coast, in the Summer months. They are the children of the Turkish republic, the first generation after the creation of the Turkish Republic, they are astonishingly, pro-secular-democracy mmm and *unclear* pro-education, mmm they can be purist elite, they most, the vast majority were never from the elite of Turkey, meaning wealthy. They were mainly like my parents, who won scholarships, to study at the university of Michigan mmm and mmm started their lives here and continued their lives here. Mmm they come from the common flux of Anatolia

⁵⁹ It should be observed that kemalism is not anymore in the place where it was before and, as we will see in more detail below, its articulation within the current Turkish American context is quite peculiar. Kemalism, in its first period was based on six fundamental principles or "arrows" known as: statism, republicanism, reformism, populism, secularism and nationalism. As also Özlem Demirtaş (2008) observes, however, today while some of its values such as secularism have become increasingly important some others have lost their relevance or have completely changed.

⁶⁰ In Turkey the AKP — Justice and Development party — often is referred to as an Islamic party but this definition is quite problematic since the Turkish constitution does not allow the existence of parties with religious programs. The AKP also rejects such a self-definition. For further information on the topic, see Yavuz (2003a; 2009).

⁶¹ When I met Deniz — pseudonym — he was not anymore ATAA's president but he released this interview on behalf of the organization — the association actually scheduled and organized our appointment. The extract, thus, can be considered the Assembly's official perspective on the Turkish American situation.

mmm the second group are those who came pretty much in the eighties and the nineties, and they are unskilled labors small businesses. Among them there is a conservative group that is secular in the lifestyle, meaning, they're conservative in the way they practice, their religion within their personal lives and their homes, and they would go to mosque on Friday, sometimes, they would celebrate thou religious holidays⁶³. But they would be mmm be very pro-secular, just like, my parents, ok, the so-called elite group⁶⁴. In the third group, is conservative, in their lifestyle, but much less favorable for secular order⁶⁵. And they are growing in numbers and in strength. Now all these groups are represented by their own individual umbrella organizations, the first group pretty much is ATAA, the group that I was the president of, the second is pretty much the Turkish American mmm Community Centers, mmm such as the one in mmm in Maryland, Southern Maryland, they usually have a mosque, they usually, celebrate all the national as well as the religious holidays, and then the third group is, the Fetullah Gülen mmm movement, followers, and their group is called Turkic American Alliance, TAA. Mmm so this is the three groups mmm but similar to ATAA in New York there is another umbrella organization called FTAA: Federation of Turkish American Associations, so FTAA and ATAA work together a lot and. under our principle of, mmm creating building solidarity within THIS diversity, we're reaching out to both these Turkish American community centers as well as the gülenists...⁶⁶ (Deniz, ATAA's former president)

In view of such diversity, the choice of using Atatürk's motto can be regarded not only as a sign of distinction, but since in Turkey the quote has been appropriated by exponents of both the secular and religiously conservative factions, its use also signals ATAA's engagement in establishing common ground among the diverse groups within the Turkish American context. Solidarity within diversity, in fact, can be seen as a fundamental condition for creating peaceful relationships with other communities but also for empowering Turkish Americans as a minority group.

⁶² For a detailed transcription see Appendix 2.

⁶³ ATAA's members are not presented as non-religious; nevertheless, it is interesting to note that here, by contrast, ATAA's members' approach to religion is eventually depicted as non-conservative both in terms of lifestyle as well as in the private sphere (but no further explanations are given in regard to this) and in the way of practicing.

⁶⁴ It is interesting to observe that in the extract Deniz makes a clear distinction between the three groups and ATAA is openly depicted as a secular and elitist — meaning addressing wealthy and educated people — association.

⁶⁵ The Hamza group does not present itself as an Islamist group but rather, at least at first sight, seems to promote a *post-Islamist* project (see Bayat, 2007). It is interesting to observe that, nevertheless, ATAA as well as a certain number of secular Turks and Turkish Americans actually have a very different perspective on the issue.

⁶⁶ It can be observed that here ATAA and its sister association are presented as the leading organizations within the Turkish American context.

It should be observed, furthermore, that the banner addresses also an American public, and — considering that in the American imagination, generally speaking, Turks are usually depicted as cruel and very religious Muslims (see McCarthy, 2010: 288) — in this context Atatürk's words can be read as an attempt to challenge those stereotypes. Furthermore, especially after 9/11, the quote also can be seen as having the function of re-discussing Turkish American identity in relation to Islam, and in particular in relation to the often misinterpreted Islamic pillar of jihad, usually associated to an extreme interpretation of the concept of a *Dār al-Islām* (House of Islam) as opposed to a *Dar al-Ḥarb* (House of war). The image of Atatürk wearing a Western suit and tie, then, reinforces the redefinition of Turks as Western (as opposed to 'oriental') and indexes, at the same time, the construction of a well-integrated upper middle-class Turkish American identity; this is also supported by ATAA's overwhelming use of English on its website⁶⁷. This choice assumes, in fact, certain linguistic resources from Turkish American readers (i.e. good formal English) that in turn implies a good level of integration and/or higher education. In the upper part of the banner it is also possible to note that the word "Türkiye" is written in Turkish; this contributes to giving the organization an authentic Turkish flavor (see Blommaert and Varis, 2011).

The construction of Turkish Americans as middle-/upper-class highly educated professionals integrated in American society is also evident in other parts of the website. Specifically, on the homepage, the "StarTURK" section (Figure 5) devoted to successful Turkish Americans can be considered as particularly relevant in this respect⁶⁸. People awarded under this program are members of the association who have distinguished themselves by having achieved success in different fields, and their achievements are reported on the website to inspire young generations and improve the



Figure 5: "Homepage" ataa.org.n.a. Web 2 Apr 2012

⁶⁷ Turkish is not used much apart from a few occasions that are probably perceived as very important by ATAA, such as membership and fundraising, or to inform visitors about "hot topics" such as the Armenian issue; one of the few translated materials, for instance, is about the content of a letter — fully available in English as well — that a deputy of CHP (Republican People's Party), Şükrü M. Elekdağ, wrote to president Obama to complain about his statements regarding the so-called "Armenian genocide" by Turks in 1915.

⁶⁸ It cannot be ignored that the StarTurk program is also an important vehicle of self-promotion for the association. To be featured under the project, ATAA in fact requires the ones selected to become members of the association and the payment of a "voluntary" donation between 100 and 1000 dollars to the Assembly.

reputation of Turkish Americans in the States (“StarTurk”)⁶⁹. The intention of promoting a positive, well integrated and middle-/upper-class image of the Turks living in the US becomes especially evident when browsing through the profiles in the StarTurk section; in contrast to what one might expect — considering the kind of people that the word “star” usually is used to refer to — there are no soccer players, pop singers, actors or models there, but rather engineers, artists, professors and doctors, one example being a woman called Sibel Blau, an oncologist developing protocols for better treating cancer patients. ATAA in this section shapes and shares its own — and supposedly a shared Turkish American — conception of celebrity, pointing at exemplary individuals who, with their work, knowledge and ability contribute to the good of their countries and of the world in general.

Promoting and encouraging excellence is a characteristic of many different associations, and successful people have often been taken as exemplary individuals for representing specific identities and groups. What is interesting here, however, is the context in which ATAA tries to promote these success narratives. The educational, economic and social background of the majority of Turkish Americans, in fact, as I explained in Chapter 2, is significantly different from that of the majority of the Turkish population in Europe. Turks living in the US, at least until the 1980s, were mainly highly educated and well-integrated professionals and still today the percentage of lower-class migrants from Turkey is not as high as among immigrants coming to the US from other countries. It should also be noted, however, that Turkish Americans — as became evident also from my interview with the former president of ATAA (see extract above) and other ATAA/ATA-DC people (see Chapter 5) — are quite a small and unknown group in the US and they are subjected to a series of stereotypes deriving from the western identity repertoires about Turkishness on the one hand and migrants more in general on the other (see Chapter 3). The StarTurk section, thus, besides having the function of encouraging civic activism among the members of the Turkish American community and sharing a positive image of Turkish Americans, can also be considered as an attempt by the Assembly to take distance from the downplaying discourses about Turks and migrants circulating in the Western world, of which the American online series *Downsized* is just one example; in it, despite the high socio-economic status of most Turkish Americans, the main Turkish American character is portrayed as an unskilled, poor and almost illiterate woman with no command of English who, after having been left by her carefree husband, moved, pregnant, to the States and started working as a cleaning lady in a company. It is

⁶⁹ Some examples of StarTurk profiles can be found in Appendix 1.

understandable, thus, that ATAA tries to challenge these and similar representations by pointing at the integration and high socio-economic positioning of Turkish Americans — or at



Figure 6: “Homepage” ataa.org n.a. Web 8 Mar 2012. Figure 7: “Left sidebar/Homepage”. ataa.org n.a. Web 9 Mar 2012. Figure 8: “Left sidebar/ Homepage”. ataa.org n.a. Web 8 Mar 2012.

least of the Turkish Americans belonging to the association. As it emerged also from my interview with ATAA’s former president, the Assembly is open to everybody disregarding her or his political, religious, educational, social, ethnic or national background. Therefore ATAA is not — but it also is — an elitist organization. It should also be observed that a strong duality is always visible between ATAA’s distinctive discourse and its all-embracing aims. As we have seen also in the quote above, within a Turkish American context, in fact, the Assembly makes a significant distinction between the social and educational background of its members and the ones of the other organizations. In this respect it is also particularly interesting to note that on the website no services to assist members with legal or economic issues are promoted, but rather what is usually advertised are conferences, essays, the organization’s yearly gala or fundraising campaigns; all activities that address and index a highly educated, integrated and wealthy community.

On the website of the association, engagement in (re)shaping the image of Turks and therefore of Turkish Americans is very evident not only in the StarTurk section but also in its campaign against the so-called “Armenian genocide” (for instance Figures 6-8). The position of ATAA toward the Armenian issue is the same as that of the Turkish government, but the denial of the Armenian accusations is particularly meaningful in the American context. Armenians, in fact, are quite a powerful and numerous minority in the US and their associations today are — as were Christian missionaries in the past — very active in spreading anti-Turkish narratives among the American population (McCarthy, 2010).

Furthermore, the issue is very timely as recently both the Senate and the House have been presented with resolutions from both sides, aiming at defining the events of 1915. The decision of the government has not been made public yet but the position of the United States might actually be very relevant as a positive deliberation might change the balance within the UN Council, and result in an international recognition of the 1915 events as “genocide”. Considering the overall context, thus, it is not surprising that in the homepage of ATAA’s website a certain number of elements address the issue, accusing the Armenians of manipulating the American public opinion, and under a separate section, the studies of a number of Turkish as well as foreign scholars supporting ATAA’s position are reported in detail. While it is obviously not possible here to analyze all those documents, it is of interest to note how the making of a secular Turkish American identity seems to go hand in hand with the denial of the Armenians’ accusations and with the public display of Armenians’ faults in the Nagorno Karabakh war against Azerbaijan (1992-1994) and in the terrorist attacks perpetrated by ASALA (*Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia*). In understanding the importance of the issue in the Turkish American context, it is indicative to look at the times the word “Armenian” has been repeated on the homepage of ATAA. On April 29th 2012, a search on the site revealed that the word “Armenian”, together with the variants “Armenia” and “Ermenistan”, appears 35 times while there are 61 instances of “Turkish/ Turkey/ Türkiye/ Turk” and the word “Azerbaijan/ Azerbaijani”, just to make a comparison, appears only four times.

Going back to the banner, the sentence “Home of Turkish-American Associations across USA, Canada and Türkiye” on the top of the block presents once again ATAA as an all-embracing association that represents the totality of Turkish Americans across the three countries (Kırlıkovalı, “Become”). Interestingly, nevertheless, there is no evidence of Canadian associations being affiliated to ATAA (“Component Associations”). Thus it remains unclear whether Turkish Canadians and Turkish Canadian associations are considered by the Assembly as Turkish American or if ATAA rather aims at representing the interests of Turkish Americans and of Turkish American associations located in Canada. Despite this ambiguity, the sentence opens an interesting reflection on the way in which the Assembly constructs Turkish Americanness. As was mentioned above, from a certain perspective the organization has an inclusive attitude toward diversity and this inclusiveness, as we have already established, covers not only the religious and/or political orientations of Turkish Americans and their socio-economic backgrounds, but also their ethnic and national backgrounds.

During my interview with ATAA's former president, he was quite clear on this point. During his speeches, he told me, he used to quote a very famous sentence from Atatürk: "Happy is the man who says to be a Turk" and Atatürk, he went on explaining, said "diyene"⁷⁰ not "DNA, meaning that we do not necessarily need to be real ethnically Turkish". The definition of real ethnic Turkishness is of course debatable, and the sentence seems to point at the weakness of its normative definition; inclusivity, in fact is just a matter of perspective and ATAA, as can be seen on its website, constructs an image of Turkish Americanness that goes beyond ethnic and national definers and promotes the idea of a broader Turkish/Turkic identity. This is not particularly evident from the different elements composing the banner of the organization. On the homepage, however, the presence of the official logo of *Pax Turcica*⁷¹ (Figure 9), a research association founded in 2009 by different Turkic American associations, seems to confirm ATAA's positive disposition toward the Russian Federation Republics of the Caucasus⁷².



Figure 9: "Left sidebar/Homepage".
ataa.org. n.a. Web 2 Feb 2012

The institute is not particularly well known in the American context, nor is it particularly easy to find detailed information about its activities; already its name, however, playing on the words PACs — the acronym for "political action committees", organizations that in the US collect funds for or against specific legislations, ballots or candidates — and PAX — the Latin word for peace — suggests the existence of common interests uniting Turkic people. The transnational Turkic orientation of the institute is actually confirmed by ATAA itself in one of its monthly newsletters where it is reported that Pax Turcica's "primary aim is to raise awareness about the common Turkic identity and to promote understanding of the Turkic-speaking world via academic programs, grassroots networking and cross-cultural dialog" ("AAC Introduces"). The institute, however, clearly points at the common background of Turkic people already through the non-textual features of its logo and in this respect it is interesting to note that the sky blue of the background (see Figure 9) might be considered an intertextual reference to the color commonly used for representing the Pre-Islamic *Kök Türkler* (Celestial Turks), from which today's Turkic peoples are supposed to originate. Also

⁷⁰ In Turkish "diyene" means "the one who says".

⁷¹ Logos and boxes linking to other websites can be considered intertextual elements connecting ATAA's discourse to other discourses.

⁷² More recently ATAA also made a declaration in favor of Crimean Tartars ("ATAA's Message about the Current Situation in Crimea").



Figure 10: "Press Releases/News". ataa.org n.a. Web 2 Feb 2012

the eight-pointed star in the middle of the logo is a popular Turkic symbol, representing the totality of the Turkic nations appearing in many Turkic national flags and coats of arms⁷³.

Clicking on the Pax Turcica logo on ATAA's website, the connections between ATAA and Azerbaijani American associations in particular become clear. Up on the top of the page, the emblem of the Assembly appears together with the ones of the *Azerbaijani American Council*, of the *Azerbaijan Society of America* and of FTAA (Figure 10). ATAA, therefore, through these intertextual elements, seems to promote quite openly a conception of "Turkishness" based upon ties — supposedly linguistic and cultural ties — that go beyond national borders in the direction especially of a common Turkish-Azeri identity; something that becomes apparent also by examining the list of its affiliated associations, among which are many Turkic American organizations, for instance, the Azerbaijan Society of America also appears ("Component Associations").

As we saw above, ATAA is a pro-secular association that, besides its all-embracing solidarity policy, seems to have a clear kemalist orientation. However, it should be noted that kemalism has changed and some of its arrows have taken a new trajectory at least within the Turkish American context. Nationalism here, in fact, takes a new meaning, expanding outside of the borders of Turkey in the direction of a Turkic/Azerbaijani friendship. It is clear that behind the promotion of Turkic identity and behind the politics of friendship toward Azerbaijan that reflect quite thoroughly the attitude of the current Turkish government, there are not only linguistic and cultural affinities but economic and geopolitical interests also play a big role. Azerbaijan, in fact, guarantees Turkey the access to the Caspian region and to its oil and gas resources. Furthermore, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, connecting Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean, puts Turkey and its overseas institutions and organizations in an interesting position for the US government as well as for American investors. Pipelines passing through Turkey are, in fact, today a valid alternative to the ones passing through Russia and Iran for the importation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea.

⁷³ This is another intertextual element. Nowadays an eight-pointed star can be seen in the coat of arms of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and in the flag of Azerbaijan.

ATAA's promotion of a common Turkic American identity can thus also be considered a strategic move specifically in the American political context. Turkish Americans, furthermore, are quite a small community and the support of other groups is fundamental for them — and for the Turkish government as well — in supporting and opposing Senate and House resolutions (e.g. the ones regarding the Armenian issue) that would influence their image and the political and economic situation of Turkey.

The case of ATAA is particularly interesting as its construction of Turkish Americanness is built on a quite explicit duality between its all-embracing solidarity policy and internal distinctions. On the one hand we have seen that the Assembly is open to diversity in many different ways. On the other hand, however, ATAA seems to construct Turkish Americanness through specific characteristics (e.g. secularism and middle-high socio-economic background). However, there is no blatant incoherence in the discourse of the association, but rather the complexity emerging from this analysis should be considered a consequence of the multilayeredness of the Turkish American experience. As the same identity can take different shapes depending on the context within which it is defined, while Turkish Americanness at an American level is a matter of establishing sameness despite internal diversities, in the Turkish American landscape it mainly becomes an issue of distinction, of “who are the people of ATAA” rather than “who are Turkish Americans”. Next, we will see how the same label acquires a different meaning on TAIL's website and the way this other organization makes sense of the Turkish American experience.

4.5 THE TURKISH AMERICAN ISLAMIC INSTITUTE

The Turkish American Islamic Institute (TAIL), as can be read on its website, is an organization located in Alpharetta, Georgia that mainly offers religious and non-religious services to the Turkish community of the area, promoting at the same time interfaith dialogue and tolerance (“Turkish Community”). This attitude has in the last decade usually gone hand in hand with the “non-violent conservative” — as my ATAA informant, its former president, defined it — Islamic transnational movement led and inspired by the teachings of the highly controversial and debated imam Fethullah Gülen (Agai, 2003: 64-5). In this specific case, however, except for some rumors on the Web (C.A.S.I.L.I.P.S), there is no evidence of TAIL belonging to the popular Hamza — or Gülen — movement that has many followers in Central Asia as well as in Turkey. The Institute, in fact, does not seem to be officially associated to any güleni umbrella organization such as the Turkic American Alliance or the *Turkic American*

*Federation of Southeast*⁷⁴. Nevertheless, at the same time on the website of the Institute there are a number of elements that actually suggest the opposite. First of all, Gülen's picture, together with a quote and a speech from him, are immediately displayed on the homepage of the organization. The present director of the Turkish American Islamic Institute, Suleyman Eris, moreover, has ties with the gülençiler as former imam of the *Istanbul Center for Culture and Dialogue*⁷⁵, as author of the book *A Brief Guide: Islam, Belief and Practice* and of several articles all published by The Light Inc., a publishing company directly owned by the Gülen movement⁷⁶. Furthermore, under the "donate" section on its website, it is stated that TAII is a unit of a bigger association known as the *Cosmos Foundation of Georgia* (CFG) about which at the time of this investigation there was no further information to be found online. However, it is reasonable to suppose that CFG might have had some connections with the *Cosmos Foundation* based in Texas, running the "Fethullah Gülen inspired" charter schools that have recently attracted the attention of the American media for being under FBI investigation regarding the hiring of a huge number of teachers from Turkey ("FBI Investigating"; "The Gülen Movement").

On the one hand there might seem to be no point in discussing TAII's belonging to TAA; on the other, however, it is extremely relevant to explain the particularity of its position within the context of the Gülen associations. Even though I would definitely consider it to be part of the Hamza group, it would be inaccurate to simply present TAII as such without considering that from a formal perspective it did not present itself nor was it presented by the gülenists as a member organization for some time — thus either inadvertently or strategically distancing themselves from the negative discourses circulating about Gülen's organization in the US as well as in Turkey.

Before going through the analysis of TAII's website, also in this case it is relevant to briefly consider the name the organization has chosen for itself. It is quite interesting to note that TAII presents itself from the very beginning as a religious organization with directive aims. The use of the word "Institute", in fact, usually associated in English with academic research centers, indexes a specific power relation between TAII and its "members". *TAII* presents

⁷⁴ When I worked on this chapter on TAII, TAA ("Members: TAFS") and TAFS websites in 2012, there was no evidence of TAII being a recognized gülençi association. In 2013, however, TAFS has added the section "Members" to its website, listing the Cosmos Foundation of Georgia (CFG) as one of its component associations. TAII is part of CFG.

⁷⁵ ICCD belongs to TAFS (Tanir, 2010).

⁷⁶ *The Light Publishing House* also prints the magazine "The Fountain" where Suleyman Eris has published several articles.

itself not as the voice of the Turkish American community but rather as its educator. “Institute” moreover, also implies a certain selection regarding membership, making inclusion and exclusion not a matter of faith or ethnicity, but rather a matter of knowledge and predisposition. It is thus not surprising to find that TAI does not accept or invite membership applications; there is no “become a member” section, but rather the Institute encourages donations and participation in the different activities it organizes.

The educational and directing aims of the Institute become particularly clear especially in the section “Humanitarian” where the position and the activities of the organization are justified through interdiscursivity and entextualization:

- 1 *One day a man looked around and saw people in need: homeless, poor, disabled. Then he*
- 2 *asked: O God, if you are the maker and the creator of every being, then why didn't you do*
- 3 *something for these poor souls?*
- 4 *Right then a voice answered him: I did something. I made you.*
- 5 As the people of the Turkish -American Islamic Institute (TAI), we want to be among
- 6 the people whom God made for others and share the feelings of troubled souls.
- 7 Unfortunately, today 13 % of Americans face hunger each morning and approximately
- 8 664,414 people spend each night without shelter. Many children live in poverty and do
- 9 not get enough nutrition in their diet. This has an adverse affect [sic] on their everyday
- 10 lives.
- 11 As the people of this society, we cannot ignore these needy souls and live as if nothing
- 12 sad happens around us. It is our sincere belief that ignoring them means not to be a
- 13 part of the human society. *Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned us:*
- 14 *"whoever goes to bed at night with a full stomach while his neighbor is hungry, is not one*
- 15 *of us".*
- 16 Our goal at TAI is to reach out to these brothers and sisters in humanity, regardless of
- 17 their age, color, ethnicity, and religion and let them know that there is somebody out
- 18 there for them. (“Humanitarian”. My emphasis)

The Institute here, looking for donations as the PayPal logo on the page confirms, presents itself in the position of leading the community in the name of a superior will that cannot be objected to. TAI, in fact, motivates its role and activities by appealing to an anecdote that might have easily come from the Hadith⁷⁷ as the use of interdiscursive elements such as “one

⁷⁷ Tracing a hadith is work for specialists and can be extremely challenging, especially if there are no explicit references to sources and the text is not reported in the original language. I was not able to find proof that the

day a man” or “Oh God, if you” might suggest (lines 1-4). Furthermore, the request for donations is also supported by another non-quoted Hadith (lines 12-13) — from Al-Adab al-Mufrad Al-Bukhari, VI: 112 — that serves to legitimize TAI’s plea for money as well as its educational and directing position within the Turkish American community. TAI’s leading aims are actually quite evident as we can observe when analyzing the website as a whole.

It is interesting to note that no power relationship between the Institute and its followers is made explicit through the use of othering discursive patterns (such as I-you constructions), which would stress the difference between the spiritual leaders and their followers. Rather, as in the extract above, the members of the Institute position themselves within the community of believers using a sort of democratic “us” that in this specific context indexes the equal condition of humans in front of God, stressing at the same time also the modesty of the Institute’s directors (lines 10-11).

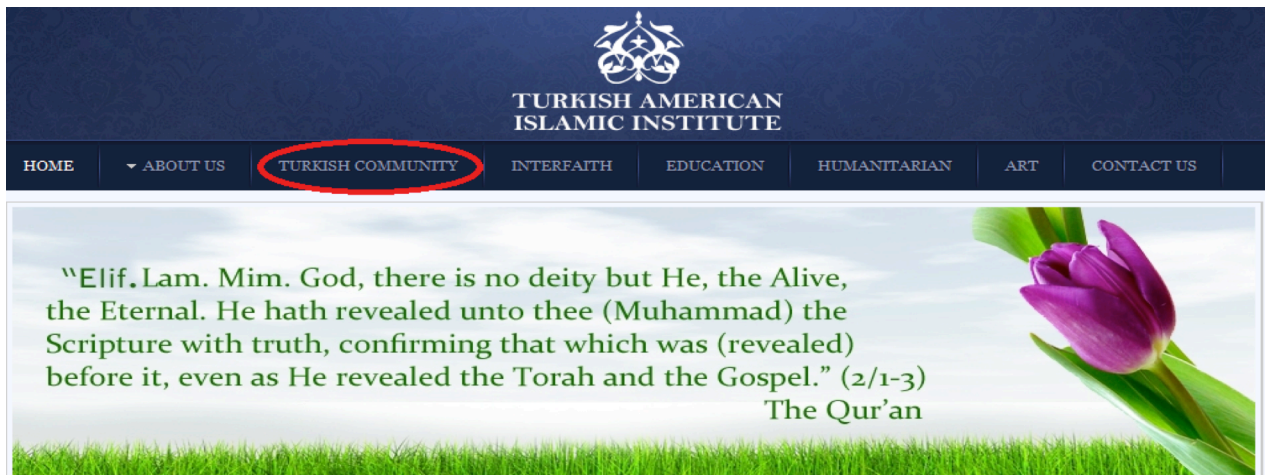


Figure 11: “Slide/Banner”. turkishamerican.org. n.a. Web 25 May 2012

Discourses aiming at positioning the Institute as a spiritual authority are quite evident throughout the website, the banner being one of the most visible examples (Figure 11). A sequence of re-contextualized highly inspirational pearls of wisdom pronounced by different Muslim personalities welcomes the visitors on the top of each page, offering them “precious” teachings (Figure 11-14). At the same time, these quotes make very clear the position of the Institute in the Islamic panorama, uncovering the theological orientation of TAI and of its community. Turkish Americans, in fact, are here specifically depicted as following a *Mevleviyya*-inspired⁷⁸ (Figure 14) form of *Hanafi Sunnism*⁷⁹ connected to the teachings of the

text here is a hadith, but the interdiscursive elements make it look like one, giving it a “holy flavor” and its origins irrelevant. Most Muslims, in fact, at a first sight would probably not be able to recognize the difference.

⁷⁸ The *Mevelevi Tariqat* is a popular mystic confraternity in Turkey whose adepts are known as the whirling dervishes. The order was founded by Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī in the 13th century and it gives particular

US resident imam Fethullah Gülen. Or, in other words, through these names and entextualised quotes TAI constructs Turkish Americanness on the basis of a supposedly peaceful, tolerant and modern form of Islam.

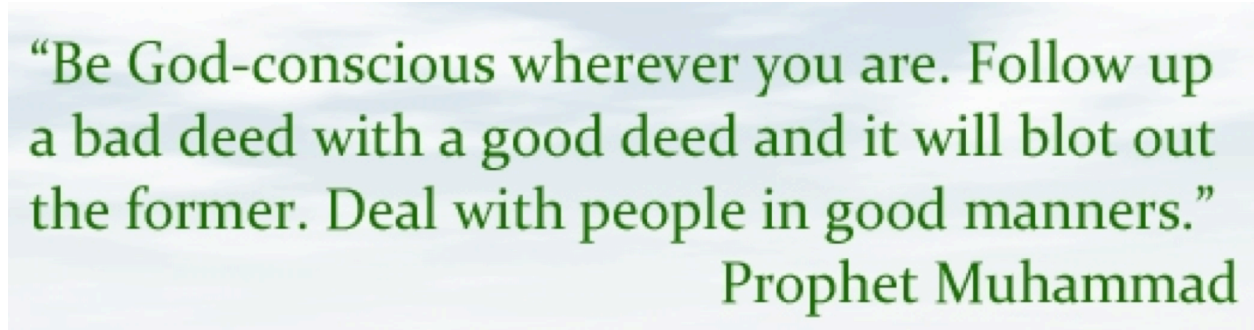


Figure 12: "Slide/Banner". turkishamerican.org. n.a. Web 25 May 2012

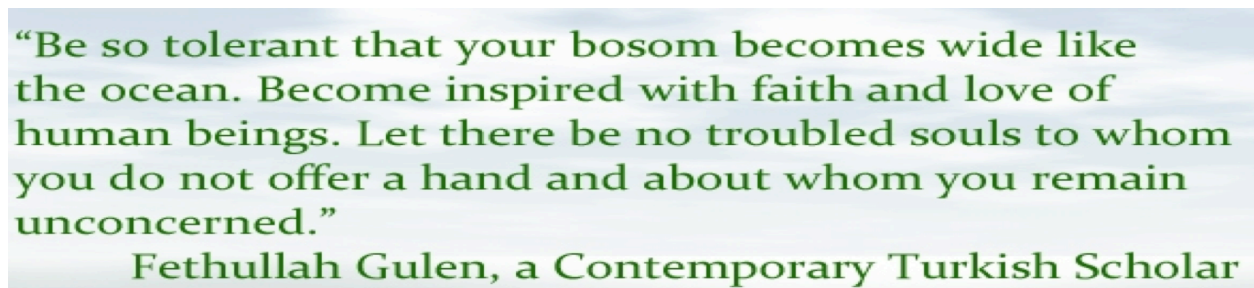


Figure 13: "Slide/Banner". turkishamerican.org. n.a. Web 25 May 2012

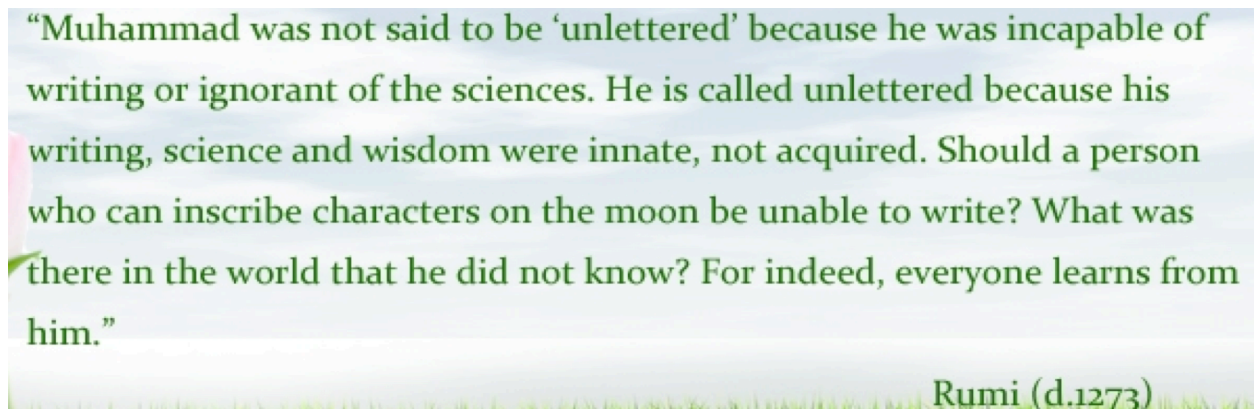


Figure 14: "Slide/Banner". turkishamerican.org. n.a. Web 25 May 2012

Analyzing the extract above ("Humanitarian"), it can be observed that Turkish Americans are mainly depicted by the Institute as a community of faith. Interestingly, however, the label

importance to the affirmation of god's unity (*Tawhid*) also through a personal search leading toward the annihilation of worldliness and multiplicity.

⁷⁹ The Hanafi School is one of the four juridical schools within the Sunni tradition. Founded in the 8th century, it later became the official juridical school of the Ottoman Empire and today it is still particularly popular among Muslims living in the countries of the former Ottoman Empire. *Al-Fiqh al-Hanafiyya* is usually considered the most liberal school of law within the Sunni tradition as it makes considerable use of *ra'y* — personal judgment — relying much less upon the Sunna. Furthermore, it also makes large use of analogic reasoning — *qiya's* — and of the principle of preference — *istihsan* (Branca, Di Fazio, et al., 1990: 137).

Turkish American, which can be found both in the name of the organization as well as the website domain name (www.turkishamerican.org), is not used by TAI for defining its community of believers, but rather, as can be seen in the menu (Figure 11), believers are addressed as “Turkish Community”. Accessing this section, users can find general information — all in English — about religious services and activities. Quite curiously, the label “Turkish”, thus — despite the existence of some significant differences in Turkey — seems to acquire for TAI an evident religious connotation. The idea of a Turkish variety of Islam presented here — also through TAI presenting itself as a Turkish American Islamic Institute — probably is an intertextual reference to what is known as *Turkish Islamic Synthesis*: a doctrine developed in Turkey during the 1970s by a group of intellectuals who tried to bring together right-wing grassroots and the right-wing intelligentsia for a fusion of Islam and nationalism, where Islam was considered an integral part of Turkishness (see Kurt, 2010; White, 2013).

On the one hand it can be said that TAI constructs Turkish Americanness based on a shared transnational Turkishness, where Turkish identity is attributed a specific religious meaning. Throughout the pages of its website, the Institute, however, also presents Turkish Americanness in terms of other facets of social identity. It seems, in fact, that for TAI the Turks living in the US can be defined as “Turkish Americans” by virtue of their being part of American society. A society that — as Yavuz also remarked in reference to other gülenist groups — in TAI discourse resembles quite thoroughly Tönnies’ conceptualization of *Gesellschaft*, a kind of association where individuals promote their self-interests acting under a common artificial law based upon the existence of an agreed social contract (Yavuz, 2003b: 28; Tönnies, 1957: 33-55). The opposition between community and society is especially evident in the extract quoted above. While the former is clearly depicted as a natural/divine union of people sharing the same faith, the latter seems rather the fruit of the gathering of individuals sharing rational wills. In the extract TAI, however, does not only appear as the leader of the Muslim Turkish community, but it also openly presents itself as a kind of a spiritual guide for the whole society; an aspect that, as we will see below, is also emphasized for instance in the “Interfaith” section of the website.

TAI positions Turkish American Muslim identity not only within Islam and the overall American context, but Turkish Americanness is also re-defined by the Institute in respect to religions such as Christianity and Hebraism that in the US are particularly influential. The quote entextualised in the banner from *Al-I-Imran* declaring the common origins of the three major Abrahamic religions (Figure 11) — even if the annotation is curiously wrong (the

source is actually Qur'an 3/1-3) — works precisely in this direction. The re-contextualization of the passage on the website has the effect of stressing TAI's predisposition toward interfaith dialogue. Furthermore, the quote, together with the ones in Figure 12 and 13, has also the function of re-discussing the stereotypes about Turks — and Muslims in general — circulating in the US especially after 9/11. Going back to the website, considering the relevance that interfaith dialogue has for TAI, it is not surprising to see that a special section is dedicated to this topic (see Figure 11). There TAI states that

Today, it is so easy to be discouraged, even depressed by what we see around us. As individuals we may feel powerless. It seems like it takes a strong faith not to give up on humanity. The world is in need of people of faith to solve common problems faced by all of us.

So, this is a call to people of faith everywhere: Let's talk! We need to get to know each other. ("Interfaith")

At a first glance, TAI's discourse seems to be an intertextual reference to the American *Pledge of Allegiance*⁸⁰, promoting quite clearly values such as interfaith dialogue and solidarity that hardly can be contested by readers. In this section, however, the Institute also suggests that since individuals and society have failed in saving the world, it is for religion and people of faith to lead humanity. From this perspective, the quote actually acquires a completely different meaning: the discourse clashes quite strongly with the open-minded image of the Turkish American Islamic community that TAI constructs and shares through the website. The moral superiority of the people of the book, as well as their right to lead humanity, is strongly affirmed by TAI at the expense of equality and democracy; an idea that is also reinforced by the quote in the fourth slide of the banner, where Islam is said to be innately superior to any other form of knowledge, including science (Figure 14).

The involvement of the Turkish American community in the American society in the first instance seems to be particularly evident through the charity activities promoted by the Institute; TAI asks its followers for donations in order to help people in need, regardless of their ethnicity or belief. This kind of discourse, especially in this time of crisis, apart from positioning Turkish Americans into the American society, also suggests a second meaning that mainly has to do with the finances of the group. Through this request Turkish Americans are depicted as wealthy enough to bear the problems of the whole society on their shoulders; a

⁸⁰ "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all". ("State Flag")

kind of rhetoric that is also shared by official gülenist groups. Not only is helping the poorest one of the duties of any good Muslim, but, according to Agai, for the followers of Gülen also work is a holy duty (2003: 59-61) and abundance is just the consequence of devotion.

The construction of a wealthy, highly educated and integrated picture of Turkish Americans is also quite clear in the case of TAIL. As in the case of ATAA, here it is also relevant to note the exclusive use of English, as well as the lack of information aimed at assisting migrants on the website, contribute to the construction of a highly educated and well-integrated Turkish American community within the American society. TAIL's choice to entextualise a narrative of an Orthodox Albanian woman, Mirkena, right on the homepage is also relevant here; her story in fact contributes to a significant degree to the shaping of a positive and successful picture of Turkish Americans⁸¹.

The autobiographical narrative is basically the story of Mirkena's engagement with a man called Ali. Before the wedding the woman is confronted with a series of negative discourses depicting Turks as violent, very religious, ignorant chauvinists. These, however, are promptly addressed by the implied narrator before the end of the story:

My second older sister, looking at the same photo commented: "He doesn't look Turkish. Look at his green eyes and his light skin. Are you sure about his origin?" she teased ... My classmates gave me the thumbs up for finding a smart man—apparently his Ph. D. studies in physics in the US proved that beyond a doubt. ... Ten years later, I smile as I remember in retrospect all the fuss about my marriage. My family forgot all their worries and demands, pleased by Ali's genuine respect and accented Albanian. He called my parents mami and babi — something my sisters' husbands never did — and he became their favorite son-in-law. My uncle didn't mind him toasting with a glass of coke either ... In the evening, as I witness our four children jump for joy and chant their happiness "Baba is here, baba is here" the moment they see their father's car enter the driveway, my heart swells with love. (Ozer, "Married to a Turk")

In concert with the Institute's conception and definition of the Turkish American community, the label Turkish American is never used in the narrative, but rather the man is referred to as a Turk living in the States. It is clear, however, considering especially the central position that the story has within the website, that Mirkena's husband — with his high education, Muslim ethics and hard work — has the role in this context of representing all Turkish Americans and

of shaping with his example the image of his community in the eyes of Americans. Offering a representation of Turkish Americans by someone from outside their community, furthermore, potentially makes the positive representation of the group even more reliable in the eyes of the readers.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

Who are Turkish Americans? In this chapter I described and analyzed some of the most “visible” discourses circulating on the Web about Turkish Americanness. The main idea of this case study was to draw a picture of Turkish American identities as they are constructed in the public sphere by two organizations that, despite having different positions, are currently contributing to the circulation of specific repertoires about “who Turkish Americans are” in society.

Identity, as was explained in Chapter 3, is an issue of becoming, of being placed within a specific social and temporal context. This analysis, therefore, does not aim at capturing one truth about Turkish Americanness, nor does it pretend to be representative of all that is to be said about Turkish Americans online, in the public sphere or by Turkish American associations. Rather, by presenting different positions, the picture I wanted to capture from this very first case study was one of a heterogeneous experience, where Turkish Americanness is not a matter of essence or of whom people “really” are, but rather of perspective. While such a premise is more than necessary to avoid essentializations and sweeping generalizations, on the other hand it should also be noted that ATAA (together with FTAA) and the Gülen group in general, are presently the biggest Turkish American organizations on US soil and the discourses of the webpages analyzed here are very likely to be reproduced online as well as offline by these associations and by their local chapters and sister organizations (see Table 1).

The websites of ATAA and TAIL, continuously dialoguing with a set of discourses about who Turkish Americans are supposed to be, provide two multilayered, diverse, but also intersecting ways of conceiving Turkish American identities. Interestingly, despite significant differences, the construction of Turkish Americanness on the secularist as well as on the gülenist side also share some common features that can be regarded as the outcome of a partial similarity in the historical and social positioning of the two associations within the

⁸¹ The story was originally published in the magazine *The Fountain*. Ozer, M. “Married to a Turk?!”. *The Fountain*

American context. For instance, in both cases the construction of Turkish Americanness is significantly driven by discourses about other identity categories into which Turkish Americans are inscribed by Americans and Westerners in general (e.g. Turks, German Turks, Islamists, Arabs or unskilled migrants). Who Turkish Americans have become today, furthermore, both for ATAA and TAIL, derives from their history and this is particularly relevant as regards their ascribed social position; even though in the recent decades the profile of Turkish migrants moving to the US has started to change, this shift, interestingly, seems to remain unacknowledged. The two associations, relying on an image of Turkish Americans that has its origins in the 1970s, and taking distance from the negative discourses circulating in the US about identity categories into which Turkish Americanness is inscribed by others, promote a well-integrated, highly educated and wealthy image of Turkish Americans. Social status, therefore, seems to be extremely important in the construction of Turkish Americanness on both sides. The Assembly and the Institute also seem to promote an idea of belonging that goes beyond the borders of Turkish and American citizenship and that moves in the direction of common interests and culture on the one hand, and religious and cultural sameness on the other⁸². Concepts such as soil or nationality, therefore, probably also as a consequence of the high level of complexity the Turkish American context is currently experiencing, do not find any space in the discourses of the two associations and interestingly, in part probably for the same reasons, also language use is defined in relation to American English rather than Turkish or other Turkic languages.

In the next chapter I will still transversally focus on ATAA, but change the site of my investigation, travelling to Washington D.C. where I interviewed and observed some of the members and sympathizers of the local chapter of the organization. Let us see now how different variables such as family and individual history, gender, social position and religion influence the way “members” belonging to this group — that thus far has presented itself as substantially homogenous — conceive themselves as Turkish Americans.

73 (2010).

⁸² It is interesting that TAIL is not very explicit about Turkicness, while the Gülen group is very active in the promotion of a common Turkic American identity.

CHAPTER 5

INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES

DISCOURSES ABOUT TURKISH AMERICANNESSE WITHIN THE ENTOURAGE OF ATA-DC

It would be wrong of me to generalize all Turks either living here in the US or in Turkey. Although there is a polarized understanding by many as to whether one has to be either "secular" or "religious" I find this understanding to contradict the REALITY that people can have "micro-hegemonized" identities as you say. Turkey is indeed very complex, and it's worth observing people on an individual level to better assess their thoughts and sense of belonging rather than following the common pattern of generalizing their thinking in accordance to the political party they sympathize with or whether they're explicitly "secular" or "religious".
(Gamze)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Despite its extreme heterogeneity, the Turkish American community has become increasingly active as an apparently uniform group in the recent years. More specifically, as I argued in Chapter 4, a few dominant groups — mainly organized around three umbrella associations whose main chapters have their offices in Washington D.C. and New York (namely the ATAA, TADF and the TAA) — have appeared. In the previous chapter I examined the ways in which Turkish American identities have been constructed by some of those organizations and as a result of an analysis of their websites a picture emerges that partially reflects the current political situation in Turkey, with power lobbies grouped around the secularists on the one side and the conservative moderate Muslims on the other. The aim of this chapter is to re-discuss and question this idea by exploring the making of Turkish American identities within the ATAA group. In this case study, therefore, I will explore in more detail the way individuals try to make sense of themselves as Turkish American (or not) by adapting their experiences to the identity repertoires they are familiar with⁸³. For this purpose in January 2012 I carried

⁸³ Hall makes a fundamental distinction between *identity* and *identification*. He claims, in fact, that people, rather than “having” an identity, identify themselves with certain labels imperfectly and partially, “suturing” their own stories and experiences to the discourses circulating in society about the identities they find themselves compelled to perform (see Hall, 2000). Blommaert, going back to this issue, claims that identification and identity actually are the same thing as they both can be considered the “outcome of a socially conditioned

out fieldwork in Washington D.C.⁸⁴, where I had the possibility to observe and interview members and sympathizers of one of ATAA's member associations: the *American Turkish Association of Washington, D.C.* (ATA-DC)⁸⁵. Before proceeding to present and analyze my data, I will first give some details about the way they have been collected, processed and analyzed.

5.2 COLLECTING, PROCESSING AND ANALYZING THE DATA

This study relies on an ethnographic — or ethnography-inspired — approach⁸⁶. A comprehensive discussion on ethnography is beyond the scope of this study. From a broad perspective, nevertheless, it can be observed that ethnography is an epistemological, theoretical and methodological approach (Blommaert, and Dong, 2010: 85) with its origins within cultural anthropology (see for instance Clifford, and Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973) which aims at describing and interpreting the ways through which members of a certain group or community construct meaning⁸⁷. It may be difficult to trace a clear demarcation line

semiotic work" (2005: 205) and I agree with him on this point. Nevertheless, from my perspective, these positions can be regarded as being quite similar: it can be claimed that they both base their observations about "individual identities" or "identification" on the main assumption that "who people are" is strictly connected to the discourses they have access to and can rely upon to make sense of themselves within society.

⁸⁴ Initially I thought that I could have spent some days in Alpharetta (GA) and carry on similar fieldwork among the people involved with TAI. However, I never got an answer from the Institute there so I decided to turn to TAA, which is also located in Washington D.C., as it actually shares with TAI quite a similar approach to the way of making sense of Turkish Americanness. Due to my strict schedule and limited finances, however, I did not really have the occasion to get introduced to anyone from its "entourage".

⁸⁵ ATA-DC is one of the members of ATAA. While ATAA operates at a national and transnational lever, ATA-DC is more connected to its physical location (i.e. Washington D.C.) and that certainly has a significant impact on the way it approaches Turkish Americanness. From a macro perspective, nevertheless, one of the aims of ATAA being to coordinate the activities of its member associations, it can be assumed that their perspectives on more general issues (i.e. ethnicity and nationality of Turkish Americans, political position, approach to delicate historical issues) would be quite similar. Furthermore, the central office of ATAA is located in D.C. and at the time of this study (but also today) some of its board members were also board members or directors of ATA-DC. It should be noted, then, that most of my informants were not only engaged in one way or another with ATA-DC but also with ATAA. Also, interestingly, ATA-DC presents itself not as a "Turkish American" association but rather as an "American Turkish" one.

⁸⁶ This has mainly to do with how we look at ethnography. On the one hand some might argue that the time I spent with my informants was not enough to talk about "real" ethnography and in a certain way I agree with them. Conditions, however, are not always optimal and I had to cope with what I had, especially in the trivial terms of money. As I will explain in more detail below, I tried to overcome the limits of my work by conducting follow-up discussions with my informants after my analysis of the first interviews I conducted with them. On the other hand, however, I would also argue that, thanks to previous literature on Turkish American(ness), when I went to D.C. I was not completely new to the overall context of Turkish, Turkish American and Turkish American associations and that helped me significantly to better understand the way my informants were making sense of the Turkish American experience.

⁸⁷ As Blommaert (2006) and Blommaert, and Dong (2010) note, ethnography is often regarded as a way to describe context or contexts. This definition, however, should not be taken to mean that context and communication acts should be studied apart from each other while, as I explained in chapter 3, they are strictly interdependent.

between the epistemological, theoretical and methodological framework at the basis of ethnography: these aspects, in fact, are strictly connected and will thus be presented here as whole.

A first observation should be made regarding the way ethnography approaches knowledge. Ethnography, unlike many other approaches, does not want to provide objective results, laws or truths about people, but, on the contrary, its outcome is a process of learning, of getting to know about others' meanings (Blommaert, 2006: 6; Velghe, 2011). Or, quoting Blommaert and Dong, its result is "an interpretative research in a situated, real environment, based on the interaction between the researcher and the subject(s), hence fundamentally *subjective* in nature, aimed at demonstrating complexity, and yielding hypotheses that can be replaced and tested in *similar*, not identical, circumstances" (2010: 16. Emphasis in the original). This consideration directly leads us to another observation about ethnography which has to do with its theoretical and methodological premises. It is implied in this declaration of aims that context matters. Similarly to CDA, ethnography also starts from the fundamental assumption that who people are and what they do is strictly related to the complex web of contexts and meanings within which they find themselves (Blommaert, 2006; Blommaert, and Dong, 2010). Contextualization, therefore, or "thick description", in Geertz's words (1973), is fundamental for ethnographic research (see also Section 3.7). Another fundamental aspect in the quote above has to do with the necessity of engaging in fieldwork in an environment where the researcher, interacting with other subjects, can acquire subjective knowledge about what is going on. It is important at this stage to acquire, through observation and other suitable methods, an emic (i.e. insider's) perspective — that is to say, to understand how the members of the group give meaning to reality. While reviewing the data collected during the fieldwork, it is then of primary relevance to keep emic and etic (i.e. outsider's) perspectives apart by reflecting on one's own position as an observer. After this brief but necessary summary of the premises of ethnographic research, let us now consider in more detail how this study has been carried out.

The data I will introduce in this chapter have been collected among the entourage⁸⁸ of ATA-DC during my fieldwork in Washington D.C. in early 2012, and they mainly consist of field notes and recordings of interviews. During the period I spent in the United States capital I was

⁸⁸ Interviewees did not necessarily had to be paying members of the association but they all were involved with ATAA at various levels: organizing or attending its social events or hanging out with people closely related with the organization.

able to collect about five hours of interviews from seven different informants (3 women and 4 men between 20 and 50 years of age; all the names in this chapter are pseudonyms), spending, in the meanwhile, a considerable amount of time observing Turkish Americans in private as well as public occasions.

Aware of the time constraints, I started planning my trip in advance in order to get as much data as I could out of my days in Washington D.C.. I paid specific attention to ensuring that I would be able to enter as quickly as possible the Turkish American community gravitating around ATA-DC without losing too much time. Therefore, about one month before my departure, in December 2011, I started networking by sending emails to local associations and friends who could help me getting in contact with someone from the Turkish American community of Washington D.C. and luckily, before leaving for the US, I already had made a couple of appointments. Furthermore, once I arrived, trying my best to meet other Turkish Americans, I immediately posted my American mobile number together with a few lines about my research on the page of two Facebook groups (*American Turkish Association of Washington D.C.* and *Georgetown Turkish Society*) and to my surprise it helped me a lot in getting in touch with other Turkish Americans, some of whom also agreed to be interviewed and to spend time with me while I was in Washington, introducing me into their circles of friends.

Before arriving in D.C. I already had a lot of information about the Turkish American context and therefore I prepared a list of possible questions and general topics I was interested in exploring during my fieldwork, but in general during the interviews I never tried to force the conversation to a certain direction (Blommaert, and Dong, 2010: 42-58). I explained my informants that I was interested in investigating Turkish American identities. Most of the time our conversations started with them asking me some general information about myself and my research; most of the people I got in contact with really wanted to understand why an Italian living in Germany and doing her PhD in The Netherlands was willing to investigate Turkish Americanness. In many cases, furthermore, my informants wanted to have additional details about who Turkish Americans were to my eyes. I will discuss this in more detail below, but when asked I replied that defining Turkish Americanness was quite problematic and that years of stay, ethnicity or citizenship were not criteria of selection for my interviews. Generally people were enthusiastic to talk about their lives and the choice of asking them as the first question “Tell me something about yourself” or “Tell me your story” was actually a good one as my informants could decide for themselves what they wanted to talk about (or

not) with their first answer and thus give a direction to our conversation. In most of the cases I had the possibility to spend some time with my informants before as well as after recording their interviews and that allowed me to better contextualize their discourses. I gave the participants the possibility to be interviewed either in English or Turkish, and they all preferred to use English. Their choice, however, was probably driven by the fact that I am more fluent in English than in Turkish, and by the fact that we started interacting in this language; therefore I decided not to overstress the importance of my informants' language preferences as identity markers.

After my return about 70% of the interviews I collected have been transcribed taking note of pauses and voice alterations⁸⁹. The remaining 30% mainly consists in poor quality recordings with the exception of a few parts I considered of minor interest for the purposes of this chapter. Those parts, however, remain still available as audio files.

In order to strengthen the validity of the study, once I completed the analysis of my data, in December 2013 I decided to triangulate my interpretations (see Chapter 3) with further data. Thus, I contacted my informants again and presented them with a draft of this chapter — more specifically, with a draft of the section based on their specific case. My main aim was to get feedback on my work, corrections of possible misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and also an update on their current situation. I started by sending all my informants a message on Facebook or an email with more or less the text below⁹⁰:

Hi XXX, how are you? I hope everything is going fine. I prepared an almost final version of my thesis and since I wrote a section based on our meeting I would really like to have your feedback on it. What do you think of my analysis? As you will see some details have been changed for protecting your privacy but if there is anything that makes you uncomfortable please tell me. If you allow me I would like to use your answer for improving my analysis and if you have time I have a few additional questions for you. First of all I would like to know if today something has changed in the way you perceive yourself as a Turkish American (or not). But I also would like to know how you see yourself in respect to other Turkish Americans and Turks living in the States but also Turks living in Turkey. To

⁸⁹ To ease the reading process, more accurate transcriptions, together with the transcription conventions, are provided separately (see Appendix 2).

⁹⁰ I remained in contact with some of the informants also after the fieldwork and developed a closer relationship with them. In these cases the messages I sent to them included also more personal information such as inquiries about health.

conclude I would also like to ask you if you *still*⁹¹ recognize yourself in ATAA (ATA-DC) policies. Well, I guess this is all, but I will be happy about any kind of comment you want to send me.

Thanks a lot, Best,

Alice

In about one week all my informants had responded by sending to me a thank you message but actually only two of them promptly included their comments and a written answer to my new questions. In these two cases, the new data were very useful in that they clarified misunderstandings and enriched my study. However, when dealing with human subjects, things do not often turn out as expected and getting feedback and updates from my other informants was more challenging than I expected. I waited for altogether 46 days, in the meanwhile sending emails, messages and calling my informants whenever I had the possibility. One informant completely disappeared, while the remaining two came back to me with unexpected comments and issues (but not with an answer to my questions) that I tried to handle in the best acceptable way both from an academic as well as from an ethical perspective. In both cases my informants were concerned — even though for different reasons — that the study could in some way damage their reputation, so they basically asked me to delete some parts of their interviews or of my analysis. In one case the deletion was minimal (one word), so I agreed to substitute the word “hated” term with a less gendered one (less gendered not from my perspective, but from the perspective of the informant). In addition, since my informant expressed her/his concern in a telephone call, I also changed some background details to further protect her/his identity. During our conversation s/he agreed with my interpretations, and did not send any further comments on the reworked version of the text. In the second case, however, the issue was much more complex, as my informant in the two years since our first interview had acquired a higher social position, and some of his/her past statements were not suitable anymore for someone in her/his current role. A possible and very interesting solution would have been to make a new interview and present in the section both my old and new data, but since my informant insisted on completely changing her/his statements I suggested, then, to hide as much as possible of her/his identity by changing or deleting some background information and — luckily but

⁹¹ In some cases, since my informants were formally involved with ATAA or ATA-DC I used the adverb “still”, but in the case of those informants whose participation was informal I omitted it. It is interesting to consider that ATAA, during the spring protests in Turkey, took a neutral position that brought some of its members and sympathizers to take distance from the association. I was actually expecting some of my informants to discuss this issue, but none of them did.

painfully — we reached a compromise. In this case, reviewing some of my interpretations was also particularly difficult as the participant always expressed her/his disagreement not in terms of “misunderstandings” or “misinterpretations”, but s/he rather pointed at the “inconvenience” of some sections and, ultimately, after some rewriting, s/he then questioned their relevance. On the basis of our last email exchange, since I had no good reasons to re-discuss my interpretations and since the participant was satisfied with the level of anonymity reached, I decided to leave those sections in the text.

5.3 LABELING AMBIGUITIES IN A SUPER-DIVERSE CONTEXT

When I started networking in order to get in touch with Turkish Americans living in Washington D.C., I had a very warm welcome from the Turkish American community gravitating around ATAA and its local chapter. Just a couple of hours after I posted my telephone number and some information about my project on the ATA-DC Facebook page⁹², I already had an appointment planned with a young entrepreneur in the entertainment industry for the early afternoon and at night in my inbox I found several other messages from people willing to collaborate or simply asking for further details about my study. A lucky beginning, I thought. In less than 24 hours after my arrival I met 3 Turkish Americans and I spent my entire afternoon and evening talking, eating and drinking with one of them and I also arranged some other appointments and a dinner for the next days. I was actually surprised by the ease with which Turkish Americans were hosting me in their houses or their offices and introducing me to other members of their community. However, some of the people who contacted me on Facebook were confused. I was looking for Turkish Americans within the ATAA group, which is a Turkish American association, but some of the people contacting me were not sure if they were Turkish American; if they were Turkish American enough for me⁹³? In fact, many of the “Turkish Americans” I got in contact with were not Turks of Anatolian descent with an American passport but they had very complex backgrounds and were not completely at ease with applying the label “Turkish American” to their particular cases. When dealing with collective identities, exclusion or inclusion into a

⁹² This is the standard post I used: “Hi everybody,/ My name is Alice Leri and I’m an Italian PhD student. I’m carrying on a project about Turkish American cultural identity and I’ll be in Washington DC between January the 14th and the 21st. If some of you or of your friends have time I really would like to meet for a cup of coffee and eventually for an interview. Please contact me on Facebook or writing to aleri@uvt.nl . Otherwise starting from tomorrow you can reach me or leave me a message calling this number 1-202-328-2000 and asking for Alice Leri./ Thanks a lot for your help,/ Alice”.

⁹³ The problematization of labels such as “Turkish” and “Turkish American” and the complexity of the Turkish American community are explored from different perspectives also in Kaya (2004) and Micallef (2004).

specific group are determined by the perspective we adopt when looking at the group itself (Hall, 1991; 1993b). In certain cases, therefore, people might feel uncertain about their own position as diverse discourses circulate about their belonging. ATAA, as I explained in Chapter 4, promotes a very broad understanding of “Turkish Americanness” by including into the community both Turks of different ethnic backgrounds as well as citizens of different nations. In the United States, as well as in Turkey, nevertheless, inclusion and exclusion are sometimes determined on the basis of very different parameters and non-ethnic Turks or especially non-American citizens are aware of the fact that they might be considered, by certain groups, as outsiders. The label “American”, for instance, was creating a certain embarrassment among some of my informants. I noticed that all of the first-generation migrants I got in contact with felt much more at ease using the term “Turk” to define themselves rather than Turkish American. The identification of the first generation with their group of origin is actually quite predictable, especially if we take into account also the fact that none of my first-generation informants had an American passport. Interestingly, however, some of my first generation informants were not even Turks in the normative sense⁹⁴ but had very different backgrounds. For instance, a woman who contacted me on Facebook wrote: “I’m actually Turkish from Germany and I moved to the US 12 years ago [...] There are only three other Turks from Germany who I met here. We are our own “kind” of Turks”. Similarly, another male informant sent me a message saying “I am a third generation (father born in the Bronx-NYC) [...]. I am half Turkish Cypriot and half Turkish”, while two other people I interviewed during my stay had Turkic origins.

The degree of complexity I observed during my fieldwork is extremely high and the concept of super-diversity discussed for the first time by Vertovec in 2006 seems to apply very well to the Turkish American case (see Chapter 2). During my fieldwork, in fact, I could observe a degree of complexity determined by elements such as US migrations, transnational movements, political and legal strategies, historical events and socio-economic factors that is superior to any level of complexity experienced before (Vertovec, 2006; 2007a; 2007b). The inclusive policies of ATAA, of course, explain to some extent the diversities existing within this specific context; diversity is one of the characteristics upon which the association builds its own conception of Turkish American community. At the same time, the diversities existing within Turkish Americans also make evident the impossibility of defining any collective identity and reveal the substantial emptiness of a collective label such as “Turk” or “Turkish

⁹⁴ A normative meaning is the “ought to be” interpretation of a semiotic element or set of elements.

American”; their meaning is constantly floating, changing from one context to another and from person to person, making it impossible to capture any stable definition.

5.4.1 TURKISH AMERICAN ENCOUNTERS WITHIN THE ATA-DC CONTEXT

In the following, considering the extreme diversity within the Turkish American context, rather than organizing my data around thematic categories, I decided to explore the construction of diverse Turkish American identities focusing on the specificities of the different individuals I encountered during my fieldwork. In the next sections, therefore, I will present my informants and their stories individually, analyzing, as we go along, their way of conceiving identity, belonging and community.

5.4.2 ADNAN: *THE TURKS, THE AMERICANS, THE MONEY, ATATÜRK AND THE TURKISH AMERICANS*

On the very first day I spent in Washington I met Adnan. As soon as I posted my help request on the ATA-DC Facebook page he sent me a friendship request and immediately we started chatting. After a few minutes he gave me his telephone number and after a short phone call we arranged an appointment for the early afternoon. On the same day he offered to pick me up directly from my hotel and together we went to a Turkish coffee place on M Street, one of the main shopping areas of the city in the neighborhood of Georgetown University. Adnan was a young entrepreneur in the entertainment industry and because of his job he knew many Turkish Americans in the city. He organizes cultural events and when we met he was working on bringing a “Turkish superstar” to Washington. Adnan moved to the US when he was 20 in order to study at an American university and immediately started organizing events. Therefore, now that he was 34 he had already been doing the job for quite a long time. He could not even think of going back without missing his life in the US; he had been living there for too many years. When I asked Adnan why he was not thinking of going back to Turkey, he immediately told me that his choice was determined by the actual political situation of the country. Adnan, as most of the Turkish Americans I met around the ATA-DC circle, was strongly pro-secular and he had a very critical attitude toward AKP that has been ruling Turkey since 2002. He was so passionate about the issue that he even had Atatürk tattooed on his body.

In the following days, I noticed that Adnan’s devotion toward Atatürk was not an isolated case but something shared by at least half of the ATA-DC people I met in Washington. I saw Atatürk featured in for instance rings, key chains and necklaces. The commodification of the neo-

kemalist ideology is not a phenomenon isolated to the Turkish American context, but already in the late 1990s it emerged in Turkey in response to the increasing visibility of Islam in politics and in society (Özyürek 93-124). The display of secular symbols such as Atatürk miniatures went hand in hand with the increasing display in the public domain of religious symbols such as the hijab and the political victory of parties — namely the Welfare Party (RP) and the AKP — perceived by the kemalists as religiously conservative or Islamist. In the last two decades, therefore, in Turkey Atatürk miniatures and the national flag on one hand, as well as the hijab or the *tesbih* (the Prayer beads) on the other hand, rapidly became signs of distinction, indexing the political and religious orientation of huge factions of the population as well as their lifestyle and consumption practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Barthes, 1973)⁹⁵. As Esra Özyürek has pointed out, kemalism is not only the state's ideology, but recently it also started to represent a “secular and bourgeois lifestyle, particular to Turkey, which involved wearing European clothes, having mixed gender social gatherings and drinking alcohol” (115) as opposed to the conservative Muslims with an Islamic-oriented lifestyle denoted by specific consumption practices such as for instance buying sharia-friendly products and financial services or enjoying holidays in resorts adhering to their religious ethic. In the Turkish American context, the function and meaning of wearing symbols such as Atatürk or the hijab is very similar to the ones in Turkey as they become signs of distinction and belonging. While wearing Atatürk clearly positions Adnan as a secularist and as member or a sympathizer of the *ATA-DC* group, it also positions him as a Turkish middle-class man enjoying a liberal lifestyle. It would certainly be interesting to find out how this sign of distinction is understood and interpreted by Americans and especially Armenian Americans (who might actually experience a very different uptake). In the US, as we have seen in the previous chapter, secularist positions at an institutional level often go hand in hand with the denial of the Armenians' accusations regarding the events of the late 1910s.

Adnan's political orientation, however, is not the only reason that brought him to stay in the US; his job in the American entertainment industry and the business attitude in the US also played a big role, as we can see from the extract below.

⁹⁵ For further details about the commodification of political identities in Turkey see Navaro-Yashin (2002); Özyürek (2006).

Extract 2:

Adnan: I might have a better future in Turkey... and I, I mean like also *unclear* but... when you say, when you live a long term... things like the mentality is different than... everything in Turklike, you cannot get along with people... everything is different...

I (Alice): Yah...

A: In here like, you know, I'm my boss, my o boss you know like, I can do anything...

I: Yeah...

A: And also it might be very difficult for my business too, because I've been in this business for like eight years. So it's not smart thing to go back, Turkey and leave everything here...

I: Yes.

A: Mmm so mmm some more money, it's not the moment, make some money *laughter*.

I: *laughter*.

A: And then, I can go back maybe.

I: Yeah and you said that, the mentality is very different.

A: Yeah because I mean... even like, for example even like. I do not know like, if you get a job in Turkey, your coworkers, it's different ... For example, when you work, you never, get whatever you work you know, I mean *unclear*, in here, even if you work as a pizza delivery guy, you can make to 2000 dollars a month, in Turkey the kids are doing that, by just drive the bicycles or motorcycles... and you know, in here, ththey do not make a *unclear*, whatever you work, is normal... in my country, not, and I do not like, I'm not saying that I'm gonna do but just some examples, when I was student here I did delivery pizza, some like this, when I was student here because it was my money and, my father was paying my school everything... and then I was... I was paying my own expenses you know...

I: Yes, of course yes I understand and, yah...

A: And respect, people does not respect much... even, it depends, but... yes

I: So would you say that in some ways you prefer to live here?

A: Well, for now, Turkey is a very big country, I love it, and it's very good... like when you go summer like it, or for vacation, not the summer you know...

I: yes...

A: Just work here, make money, like Germans...

The possibility of having an independent business, respect and a higher income are the main reasons that have brought Adnan to choose a life in the US. In Turkey he would have probably earned much less money but especially, in a society where personal connections and seniority still play a big role in the business environment, it would have been very unlikely for him to

succeed in building such a successful business out of nothing without partners or informal sponsors (his perspective). As Adnan said, he is now his own boss and after eight years he cannot imagine working under different circumstances. The radical differences between Turkey and the US repeatedly emerge in his words through recurring expressions such as “in here” and “in Turkey” that signal at the same time both a perceived physical and cultural distance. Turkey seems to be the exact opposite of the US and in the business sphere whatever is good “in here” is bad “there”. The opposition of the two spaces also emerges especially in the private domain in terms of emotional attachment. While the US is positively presented by referring to factual advantages that make life easier or more pleasant, Turkey, on the other hand, is never openly depicted in a negative way but is rather described by statements connected to positive feelings that have no relation to pragmatic reality but that are rather rooted in Adnan’s emotions and identification with the country.

Like Germans — referring to German Turks⁹⁶ — Adnan joked, he goes to Turkey for holidays and spends there the money he makes in the US. The parallelism, however, considering commonsense identity repertoires about German Turks (see for instance Akinci, 2002), also applies, in a certain way, to some other aspects of Adnan’s life in America: as he also admitted, in the last seven or eight years he had lived in the US like he was in Turkey, eating Turkish food and listening to Turkish music. I noticed that even his house was quite “Turkish”. His American flatmate had worked in Ankara for a period and developed a certain taste for Turkish furniture of any size that he placed everywhere around the house. Adnan also contributed to the turkification of the flat with Turkish ornaments, Turkish cable TV, bottles of Raki, Aegean olive oil and Fenerbahçe S.K.⁹⁷ paraphernalia. Almost everything around Adnan was Turkish. Because of his job, moreover, he speaks a lot of Turkish for someone living abroad. He speaks Turkish with the guests, he speaks Turkish with some of the people he works with and with many of the people attending his events⁹⁸. They are students, but they are also members of the Turkish American community. Adnan, in fact, does a lot of advertising through the ATAA/ATA-DC network. Sometimes, he told me, he even helped the association to bring Turkish guests to the US for festivals. He feels very proud of being Turkish because being Turkish, he explained to me, is “very good”. Once more, as I pointed out above, it can be observed that identification happens in the private domain and is manifested by Adnan in

⁹⁶ The label “German” here has an indexical meaning. By using this word Adnan, draws a clear distinction between German Turks and Turks and implicitly suggests that the formers cannot be even identified as Turks anymore.

⁹⁷ One of the three soccer teams from Istanbul.

terms of emotional attachment. In contrast, when he started talking about his integration in the American society, Adnan went back again to a more tangible dimension. Interestingly, as can be seen below, integration is conceived by my informant especially in terms of bonds, material possessions and wealth.

Extract 3

A: Everything is here, like my friends are here...

I: Yeah...

A: I have, my dog is here, my parrot...

I: *soft laughter*

A: My friends, my car... in Turkey like when I go there I just go there for vacation.

I: Yeah...

A: But when I go Turkey I use my father's car, but when I'm here I use my own car, I'm just making examples, you know...

I: Yes yes...

A: I will laugh you, I make money from here.

Money plays a central role in Adnan's understanding of the American society and for him to feel integrated it is enough to be economically successful⁹⁸. So, in this perspective, his expensive car, his clothes and his luxury lifestyle index his wealth and his integration. Adnan also conceives money as one of the main values for the Americans and that is very evident when he talks about the Turkish American community. In the US, Adnan explained to me, there are Turkish people for whom it is important to be Muslim. They are the followers of Gülen and they are helped by the Turkish government to go to the US and to find a job. In addition to them, according to Adnan, there are three other groups of Turkish people: the ones who moved to the US a long time ago, who studied and who now live in the US; the Turks who went to the US to work, like in Germany, and the students. The main distinction that Adnan makes within the Turkish American community, however, is between the Turks and the Americanized Turks. Talking about this latter category he told me:

⁹⁸ All these objects and practices might be considered to index a low level of adaptation.

⁹⁹ Adnan's economic success and his integration-feelings are strictly connected to his professional activity. As he said during our interview he feels integrated because he "works like Americans" and in respect it is relevant to observe that probably it especially in this sphere that he is attributed — and perform — the role of the "American" (or at least of the one who is familiar with the American context) by his Turkish guests and collaborators.

Extract 4

A: ...They are not like your, good friends like even back home you know, *unclear*, for long time they stayed here and they have changed or... *sigh* the family they send trouble kids I guess...

I: *laughter*

A: For *unclear* a long time they are Americanized, they've being selfish...you know Americans are selfish isn't it...

I: Yes...

A: They, they, I still have cousins here... they, they went back to Turkey... I stopped taking them like, four five years because they are Americanized, you know like ...

I: Can, can you make me some example or...

A: For example I, I broke up, with my *embarrassed laughter* girlfriend, I was kind of I called them and they are saying "oh, you're sad", they said *unclear*, I asked him money like, because I was a student and I needed some, some like, fucking money.

I: Yeah...

A: And my father helped, helped ththeir family to get married you know...

I: Yes...

A: So, and he said "no hum" and, and I told them Emrah, "I mean is, is a minimum", and he said no for a couple of hundred dollars...so I was like wow... ok.

According to Adnan there is a substantial difference in terms of economic generosity between the Turks and the Americans or the Turks who have become Americans. This is a difference that is also reflected in the way they take care of their families and educate their children. If America is the place where working and making money is easier, for Adnan it is also the place where money is more valued and family ties count much less. Interestingly, in the extract above Adnan never talked about "Turkish Americans" but rather about Turks who have become "Americanized". The label Turkish American in fact was used by Adnan during our conversations only in order to refer to second-generation migrants. Outside our interview, Adnan was also often commenting on the ATA-DC people I was involved with during my fieldwork, and while talking about one of my informants who is an influential second-generation Turk, he defined him with no hesitation as a "fake" Turk with no authentic features, especially because his proficiency in Turkish was not 'good enough'.

5.4.3 ESRA: BRINGING TURKEY TO AMERICA AND FEELING (NOT YET) AT HOME

A few days after I arrived I met Esra, a young professional in her thirties and very active in the Turkish American community. A friend's friend introduced us to each other in December and

before meeting we exchanged some e-mails about my study. She was working for a very well-known organization and as soon as I arrived she welcomed me very warmly and immediately invited me to join her for lunch. We chatted for a couple of hours. She was very curious about my project but also was very talkative. Exactly like Adnan and most of the first-generation people I met in Washington D.C., she had moved to the US to achieve a better education and after a master's degree she just stayed in America even though that was not in her plans.

Extract 5

Esra: So mmm yeah, I came here to do my masters' degree and then when I graduated, this was 98/99 mmm the American economy at the time was doing really well during the high-tech boom so, and I wasn't ready to go back I mean I was enjoying myself, I really liked my life here and I just wanted to stay more mmm so I wanted to work here for a little bit and I got a job, because when you graduate from an American university you get a mmm one year work authorization...

I: Okay...

E: And I wanted to use that mmm and, I started working, for a, first an, an organization called Turkish Place and then with an American organization mmm so it kind of that extended you know, this company got a visa for me, one more year one more year mmm and then, in about two years or so I got a job, a consulting job at another American organization, and I thought well I cannot miss this opportunity, let me get this experience and then go back to Turkey, then I *laughter* joined the organization and I was in between I mean, from 96 to 2011, fifteen, sixteen years.

Esra has a very successful career. Talking, however, I discovered that her job is not the only reason that ties her to the US, but during her stay she also got married to a non-Turkish, non-American man which has brought her to seriously consider living in America on a permanent basis. Of course she could move to his home country for a few years' adventure, but she is convinced that it would be difficult for her to live there and the same would go for her husband in Turkey. "Eventually", she said to me, "this is gonna be our home". This sentence, however, is very revealing, as here the going-to construction indexes that the US is not their home yet. Home, for her, as can be seen below, is still Turkey, and America can eventually become home just through a process of appropriation that my informant carries out through her continuous involvement in the Turkish American community.

When Esra told me that she was willing to make of America her home, I asked her if she felt in any way American and this is the answer I got:

Extract 6

E: ...So I mean I grow up in the smaller safe secure town mmm and I always wanted to come to the, US but mmm I never thought I would end up living here honestly, because I mean. I didn't even... listen to, American, you know like some people are really into the American culture, I wasn't like that I would listen to Turkish music I watched Turkish movies I was, I was like, very Turkish to the, core mmm of my bones I mean *laughter* so mmm I mean never though mmm I would end up staying here but mmm I, I ended up staying here and I, I quite feel mmm If, if I say I don't have a green card I still or, or the citizenship but I feel like a Turkish American now.

I: yah yah...

E: mmm more than just you know, one or the other, and I think... maybe one of the reasons why I was able to survive here, for a long time and feel like at home is because I'm so... Turkish that I was able to create my environment, here mmm and build around it so I never felt like I was mmm you know I always had Turkish friends, I had, Turkish food, my Turkish music, my parties my associations my clubs so I mean mmm it wasn't for me mmm like I felt so lonely or I missed my culture, I was always able to live my culture.

As I just mentioned, Esra's identification with the Turkish American group has to do to a great extent with her ability to create her own cultural environment in the US. This fragment, however, reveals a much more complex frame in terms of cultural identification. When I asked Esra if she was feeling American, she answered starting from her childhood. She wanted to make it clear that she grew up in the Turkish culture and before moving she *was* very Turkish. What is very interesting here is that being Turkish, for Esra, has to do especially with lifestyle and more in particular with the consumption of Turkish cultural artifacts, such as movies or music. This attitude was also evident when she claimed to have created her own environment in the US. For her, living and displaying her own culture has mainly to do with meeting other Turks and experiencing, for instance, Turkish music, dances, parties and food. At a certain point, however, Esra states that more than Turkish or American, she feels especially Turkish American; a feeling that can be understood and explained reflecting especially on the specific role that my informant has within her community. Esra actively contributes to the making and to the diffusion of Turkish American identity through the re-contextualization of Turkish secular culture in the American society through cultural activities and the diffusion of selected cultural artifacts and narratives. Within a legal domain, however, Turkish American is not the way my informant would define herself and she states it very clearly that she does not have American citizenship.

For a while we discussed Esra's involvement in the Turkish American community. She gave me some information about the organization of the Turkish Festival in the city and we also discussed the presence of some pets' stalls promoting Kangal dogs and angora cats, which are both considered to be Turkish breeds. From there the discussion moved to the heritage activities Esra had started with some Turkish and Turkish American fellows in Washington D.C. some years ago. They have a school with a professional teacher where children, especially Turkish Americans, can learn Turkish traditions and they often perform at different Turkish festivals. Their activities, Esra explains to me, have the aim of promoting Turkish culture; however, they usually do not perform at events organized by the Gülen group. In the US the division between the secularists and the Islamists within the Turkish American community seems to be quite strong and the two factions almost never collaborate. In Washington D.C., however, Esra explained to me, the situation is slightly different and from time to time exponents of the ATAA and of the TAIL meet in order to discuss their projects and eventually to collaborate on letters to write to the Congress when, for instance, there is a resolution coming out on the Armenian issue. Esra, yet, is clear that despite a certain amount of dialogue there is a huge difference between the two groups.

Extract 7

E: For instance you see in those groups more people who come from, smaller cities, or even from big cities they are from more religious backgrounds...

I: yah...

E: mmm most of their mmm women cover their heads, although not all might cover I mean they have some who, do not cover but most of them do... and you do not really see women that much... out, if you see mmm a woman like a speaker something at one of their events, usually it's an American woman, you do not see a Turkish woman mmm doing all those embassy jobs, so it's mmm I mean it's a different way of structure and they have mmm faith people, they have professional staff mmm I do not think they get paid FINE because they kind of operate in a missionary mentality, but you see also very few women also working for this organizations, if they do work again, they are more in the supporting roles like they volunteer to make the, the food...

I: okay...

E: catering for the events and stuffs like that mmm whereas I mean, if you come to our board it's 80% *laughter* women *laughter*...

I: yes I understood that *laughter*...

E: so mmm that's the main concern, and I think... unfortunately mmm this is a big divide between our, our groups like in, Turkey...

The approach to religion seems to be the major divider between the ATAA people and the gülenists from my informant's perspective. Despite the fact that Esra would identify as a Muslim, her religious identity has almost no influence on her lifestyle or on her political opinions or on her way of conceiving gender roles. This variable is influential only as regards the religious domain. The extract above clearly illustrates the way in which the difference in conceiving gender roles between the gülenists and the secularists emerges in discussions on aspects that seemingly have nothing to do with gender. Whereas the women in the gülenist circle are depicted by Esra as having a subordinate role, in the ATAA group they actually are presented as leaders. The link between Esra's political engagement and her way of conceiving gender roles, however, becomes particularly clear when during our conversation I suddenly noticed her Atatürk ring. Before I could even ask her to see it, she stopped talking and, sensing my interest, showed me her fingers. "As a Turkish woman especially I," she explained to me, "personally feel very thankful... for, for Atatürk for what he has done, for us because I think he completely changes, a country a society everything by getting... women... next to, men...". Once again the Atatürk miniature, as in Adnan's case, is an intertextual reference that indexes Esra's strategies both of differentiation and belonging within the Turkish and Turkish American context. As a woman and as a female leader of a local community, however, wearing a kemalist symbol also acquires an additional meaning for Esra that is directly connected to her right, as a woman, to be actively involved in society and politics. In this way, she radically takes distance from the conservative understanding of femininity and masculinity of radical Muslims, opposing the segregation of the sexes, and also the male-supporting rather than active role of women in society.

5.4.4 ELIF: VARIABLE CONTEXT AND VARIABLE LABELS

As soon as I arrived in Washington D.C. in January I contacted Elif. She was one of the friends of a friend's friend and in December we had already exchanged some emails. A few days before I left for the US she gave me her telephone number and when I called her we agreed to meet the day after. It was a Saturday and it also was my second day in Washington. We had an appointment in the early afternoon in front of a chic hair salon in Georgetown, almost in front of the Turkish café where I had been the day before with Adnan. Elif, rushing, arrived a couple of minutes after I got there. She was a pretty young woman in her twenties and she was actually very elegant and polished for the occasion. I thought we would have had a coffee together since it was the first time we meet each other, but the coffee came much later. There

was a Turkish performance at a museum that day and the show was starting in only 40 minutes. Elif was really willing to attend the screening and she thought that it also would be a nice networking opportunity for me. The place, in fact, would probably be full of Turkish Americans and she would also introduce me to some of her friends. In less than five minutes we already were in a cab heading to the other side of the city and Elif was pointing me all the attractions of Washington D.C. from the back window of the car. She knew Washington quite well and she really liked the city and its political atmosphere. She had been living there for some years already, she explained to me. Before coming to Washington she had stayed in Chicago, but then got married with a successful American man who now was working for a local law firm and together they decided to move. She was very glad about their choice. The city was full of amazing and knowledgeable people and there she also had the opportunity to get involved with the Turkish American community. Like almost all the first-generation Turks I met in the US, initially she had left her home city to achieve a better education and after getting her master's degree she just decided to get married and to stay even if she was not exactly expecting that to happen. She had always considered her family an important part of her life and she did not really like most of the American men she met, she explained to me. They were just too flexible, too careless and they were not very interested in her culture, but her husband was different of course. However, she was actually thinking to go back to Turkey for some months. In a few years she was planning to have a baby and she really wanted to have her family around her. Furthermore, she was thinking it would also be important for the baby to be exposed to Turkish culture. It would be just a temporary solution however, since she and her husband were planning to live in the States.

We arrived to the museum a few minutes before the show started. Some of Elif's friends were already there and she kindly introduced me to some of them. They were all young women from the local Turkish American entourage. As soon as the performance finished and the debate in the room started, Elif whispered to me all her disappointment and expressed her wish to leave the room. In my view the show was actually a good one and I could not really understand her, but at a coffee bar she explained to me that she was not happy with the choice of the particular show. She was concerned that such a critical movie was not exactly a good advertisement for the country as it was just showing its negative aspects (e.g. poverty, social inequalities, patriarchalism) without stressing its positive sides. Elif was very passionate about the topic. Only in Washington D.C. she became "aware of the issues her country was facing in the US" and now she was determined to do everything she could to

change people's minds. Actually Elif never mentioned the specific issues involving Turkey and Turkish citizens in the US as a Turk; however, she seemed very worried by the idea of looking inferior and of looking like someone coming from an inferior culture.

Extract 8

Elif: the first time I came to America was in 2004... I think, yes it was, I came here for vacation and I loved America, it's the new world *laughter*, then I came here for a work and travel study program and I experienced Miami, you know, I worked at a place called Gigi's Music Palace which is a great experience, but then I came here as a student. and the problem was, because I loved this country so much and I was very eager, very excited, but the thing is...once you really get into it, you know you can understand that people can have some people can really bites sometimes like "Where you came from", you know it's very sad because, even like when I was studying... for my Master's degree we were having you know group like activities, people just assume that you just don't know and do not have the education...

In the fragment above it is clear that Elif finds the way Americans perceive Turkey, but especially foreigners, very disturbing. She does not like to be undervalued and cannot stand to be constantly treated like a migrant with no education and perspectives. As I explained in Chapter 2, Turkish Americans or Turks in the US are usually well integrated in the American society, but, as McCarthy observes (2010: 287-97), still perceived in a negative way. What seemed to be particularly disturbing for Elif was to be considered as a migrant, as someone who moved to the US to pursue a better life while she actually had plenty of other possibilities. It is especially because of this discrimination that she wants to become someone and "to stick out from a bunch of people". She was working hard and that had not only to do with her job, but her project implied a full process of personal branding that she perceived as absolutely necessary in the US. Elif's need to construct her identity, or her "brand", however, clearly gets in this context not only a cultural but also a social dimension. As someone with a high-class background, Elif, in fact, seems interested in re-establishing especially her social identity and this was quite evident also from her overall expensive look that clearly indexed her social position or, at least, her ascribed social position.

It is interesting to see that if on the one hand Elif is frustrated by the negative perception of Turkey in the States, somehow she also acknowledges the hegemony of the American culture and this emerges for instance by looking at the extract below where my informant expressed me her concerns with children growing up in the US.

Extract 9

E:...I know that... families are having really hard time... with their kids, because kids are just like, not talking in Turkish at all... they are just refusing it, because they feel like Turkish culture is not really... is not better than American culture, they do not understand, you know the history, they do not understand, traditions, they feel like they are old fashioned, you know Turkish music is boring or do not appreciate the traditional folk dances are not, great, you know...

I: *laughter*

E: But they like, you know the, hip hop kind of...

I: yeah...

E: ...culture, so *laughter* which I cannot blame anyone...it is very tough here and, I do not know what I am gonna do if I'm having a kid with my husband... I want him, or her, to really acknowledge his Turkish, SIDE of it, but I know that it's gonna be, you know of course always be more impressed by the American culture, like everyone he wants to go to the American, side of it, so it's our job to make sure our kids are not, just being *laughter* one sided, you know with a one sided culture but both so it's a little tough...

While the extract might seem to contradict most of what has been said about Elif until now, my informant, by pointing at the hegemonic position of American culture, is not claiming its superiority but rather its perceived attractiveness. In her experience, "Turkish practices" and consequently Turkish identity, especially for Turkish children born in the US, are far less "attractive" than the ones of the dominant culture.

While Elif is very eager to promote Turkey in the States, her identification as a Turk is strictly connected to the specific context of the US. Even if she has a green card and is married to an American, in fact she does not really feel American, and during our discussions she actually never referred to herself with the label Turkish American. Interestingly, when we started talking about religion, Elif also defined herself as European rather than as a "traditional Turkish person". She grew up living in a very secular environment. In the Turkish context, being Turkish and being Muslim somehow coincide for her, and her identification as a European can be understood only considering the fact that her family belongs to the intellectual and secular elite of the country. In Turkey, the middle and middle high class often grew up attending European schools such as the French or the Italian lyceum in Istanbul. Furthermore, the kemalist project traditionally looked at Europe as a model to pursue for its laicism, its advanced technologies and for its organization of the res publica and this attitude was also reflected in the lifestyles of the Turkish secularist elite, which was often for instance

wearing European clothes, speaking French and playing Western instruments or dances. Considering Elif's family background, it is very likely that she grew up in a very European environment characterized by a specifically Turkish understanding of European culture. I would argue, therefore, that Elif's identification with Europe rather than with Turkey indexes the affirmation of a particular Turkish identity located in a specific social, religious and political context that coincides, in her case, the historical kemalist elite.

At the end of the day Elif kindly offered me a ride downtown. She took out of her bag the keys of her car and there again was another Atatürk miniature staring at me with its blue eyes.

5.4.5 GAMZE: A VOICE (OUT) OF THE CHOIR

The afternoon I went to the museum, Elif introduced me to some of her friends and that day I also met Gamze. I remember that while we were talking and waiting for the movie to start she rushed toward our small group and asked us in Turkish if we had a scarf with us. She wanted to pray but unfortunately she had nothing to cover her head with, but realizing no one had what she was looking for she just gave up and started talking to us. She also was one of the people involved in some way with ATA-DC and she knew Elif and her friends quite well. Noticing my presence, she immediately asked me if I was Turkish. Elif was talking to me in English but the fact that I answered her previous question in Turkish probably puzzled her. In the recent years, in fact, I developed a very German accent and together with my Mediterranean appearance it might have brought Gamze to think I was a German Turk. When I explained her I was an Italian Turkologist living in Germany she just asked me a couple of courtesy questions in Turkish and then the group shifted to English again.

During my stay in Washington D.C., Gamze is without doubt the only person who approached me in Turkish, while all the others actually never related to me in a language other than English. Of course I met people who had been in the US for only a few months and they always preferred to speak Turkish with me, but it never happened that my informants, who had already been in America for years, decided to address me in Turkish apart from some rare occasions (for instance, in front of a third person such as a student or a waiter who could not understand English). Communication among us was definitely easier and faster in English, considering my proficiency in the two languages. Gamze's attitude, however, cannot be considered as a consequence of her language skills. In fact, interestingly, apart from one of the former presidents of ATAA, Gamze was the only one among my informants who had been born and had grown up in the US. Her proficiency in English therefore was native-like (or

almost). In a Turkish American context, like at the museum, however, Gamze's choice of using Turkish rather than English in establishing a first contact with me can be reasonably interpreted as an attempt to display but also to reinforce her identification with the Turkish/Turkish American community. In fact, as a native English speaker she does not need to "prove" her proficiency and flexibility — the fact that she has a voice — in the use of English to show me her high degree of integration and social status both in Turkey and in the US. On the contrary, English is the only language everyone expects her to speak. First-generation Turkish Americans, in fact, believe the second generation to be highly proficient in only English (Adnan, Elif, and also Cem below) and sometimes they even define them as "fake Turks" (as in the case of Adnan), pointing out their inability to understand and speak any Turkish. In this specific context, therefore, preferring Turkish to English and showing her fluency in both the languages, Gamze also positioned herself as a "real" Turk, especially in front of the other Turkish Americans — among which there was also Elif who grew up in Turkey — with whom I was talking at the museum.

A few days after our first meeting I called Gamze over the phone. It was early morning and she sounded still a bit sleepy. Unfortunately she had no time to meet me in the city but was very willing to participate in my research, so I arranged everything for recording our conversation through Skype and a few minutes later we started recording. As the first question I asked Gamze to tell me her story and what came out was something very interesting.

Extract 10

I: Yeah, tell me your story what are you doing here where are you coming from and...

Gamze: Sure, well I was born and raised in America... my family has been living here since the early '70s. My family actually, my ancestors trace back to Uzbekistan, so I am both a Turkish American and a Turkic American. My grandparents migrated from Uzbekistan to Turkey although they had a lot of different options in terms of where they could migrate, they actually first migrated to Saudi Arabia, but then decided that they would feel more comfortable raising their children in another Turkic country... so they emigrated there and that's where both sides of my family ended up living and raising my parents. My father was born in Turkey and was raised there whereas my mother was born in Saudi Arabia but she was raised in Turkey, I think she must have moved there when she was five or six years old, and so I have been very fortunate because my family, especially my mother's side of the family is very very patriotic, and I would say that holding this preference was a sincere effort to safeguard our traditions, values identity and cultural integrity in response to the communist invasion. Therefore my grandparents have instilled, a great love of

Turkic and Turkish culture within, in, to BOTH MY PARENTS, but particularly my mom's side mmm and so... and so my family has worked, even though they migrated here in the seventies, they have worked very very hard to preserve our culture, and luckily they transmitted a lot of those values to me too and so, having grown up in America I mean I was still able to KEEP a lot of my own values, and so for that I'm really really grateful¹⁰⁰.

Gamze comes from a transnational family and her case is particularly complex. Her double identification as a Turkish and a Turkic American in fact seems somehow problematic for different reasons. It is not immediately clear, for instance, why Gamze identifies herself as a Turk but not as an Uzbek. Moreover, reading the extract above, it is also possible to notice that Gamze always and only refers to one single culture as her "own" in contrast to what one might have expected considering her background. To understand these issues and to have a better outlook on the case of Gamze, it is actually necessary to move a step back and contextualize her and her family experience in the historical background of Turkic Central Asia.

One of the first important considerations to make about Central Asia is that actually only recently peoples from those countries started to identify themselves as Turkmens, Uzbek, Tajiks, Kazaks or Kyrghyzs while earlier they referred to themselves mostly as "Turks, Turkmenistanis (Turkistanis, in Gamze's phrase) or Muslims in contrast to Christians"(Hyman, 1997: 340). Therefore, considering that Gamze's grandparents probably moved from Uzbekistan between the 1930s-40s it is very unlikely they ever referred to themselves as Uzbeks and it is thus not surprising that their grandchild does not consider herself as such either. Hyman (1997), moreover, argues that it is especially a supposed language unity that played a fundamental role in the construction of a common identity¹⁰¹ shared by Muslims speaking different Turkic dialects and the importance of language in determining belonging is evident also in the case of Gamze. As can be seen below, when I

¹⁰⁰ Gamze mostly agreed with my analysis and still recognizes herself in what she told me when we first met but after reading the chapter she decided to partially re-edit my transcriptions as she thought that it would have improved the clarity of the text. She wrote me: "I speak quickly and slur in my speech so that's why a lot of what I said was grammatically incorrect/incoherent. I hope the latest revisions [...] will bring better light to what I intended to say at the time. I also provided notes in parentheses to explain these revisions". The case of Gamze, nevertheless, is not exceptional at all; all the interviews conducted for this book included broken sentences, long pauses and grammatical incongruences. Gamze certainly was not aware of this as she only had access to the section focusing on her case. It is interesting, however, that, unlike others, she decided to rework the interview correcting what she perceived as mistakes while the content basically remained unaltered (see Appendix 2 for the original transcription). These changes are meaningful in the sense that they can be considered a clear statement from Gamze's perspective: by making use of specific linguistic resources (i.e. correct English), she performs a certain identity — she highlights, in fact, her being a native speaker of English, and in this case, an educated American and not just an unskilled or a non-integrated migrant.

¹⁰¹ For further details about pan-Turkism and the making of a collective Turkic identity see Hyman (1997); Landau (1995); Poulton (1997).

asked her to elaborate on the specific cultural values her family transmitted to her, she immediately mentioned language as the first aspect.

Extract 11

I: Can you make me some, some examples of those values or things that you parents.

G: Certainly, well for example let's see, I've been able to speak our own language at home, this is something that unfortunately seems to be a LUXURY, nowadays, not every Turkish family speaks Turkish at home, but I'm very grateful that I'm able to speak both Uzbek and Turkish.

I: wow!

G: Mmm and, I mean, "maintaining full Turkishness" is not something that happens very often as mmm a lot of families you know, they stick to the country, that they move to and they fully get assimilated into its predominant culture.

Also in this extract, as in the previous one, Gamze does not seem to make any difference between her identification as Turkish and a Turkic American. If earlier she talked about one single culture as her "own", also here, she refers to a single language rather than to languages and to single "Turkishness". The use of the adverb "locally"¹⁰² for introducing her ability to speak both Turkish and Uzbek together with the fact that Gamze always refers to a general Turkish community seems, however, to suggest that she perceives Turks and Uzbeks as local subgroups with particular characteristics within a common culture. That is an idea — affected to some extent by Pan-Turkic discourses circulating in Turkey and central Asia since the late 19th century (Poulton) — to which more recently Gamze has decided to dedicate her life by founding a nonprofit organization "which seeks to bring awareness to the shared identity among Turkic groups while building bridges with humanity and the environment" (Gamze).

Going on talking about the important values she acquired from her family despite the fact that she grew up in the US, Gamze mentioned religion as being the most important. I knew from the veil episode at the museum that she was quite a pious (meaning practicing) Muslim. She was not wearing the hijab, but she explained to me that she always prayed five times a day and she tried to live in accordance with the principles of the Qur'an, although she was not very specific on the way she interpreted the book. Her religion actually never created her any problems when she was among Americans, but absenting from alcohol and pork — she later specified alcohol more so than pork — was perceived as particularly weird by the "hardcore secularist" (Gamze's words) members of the Turkish American community (abstaining is a

practice that within the secular context often indexes a different social and/or political positioning). Conceiving religion as a private practice, in fact, public displays of faith are usually not encouraged by secular Turks. Therefore Gamze was actually quite an unusual individual for the ATA-DC group and she was absolutely aware of that. The discrepancy between her political identification and her way of living Islam, however, is a fundamental point for understanding her double identification both as a Turk and a Turkic American. As can be seen below, while one of the labels seems to refer especially to Gamze's political attitude as a secularist, the other, instead, is specifically used in order to refer to her religious identification as a practicing Muslim. The collective labels Gamze uses to describe her identification in different domains of her life and her position within different contexts therefore point to an apparent fragmentation.

Extract 12

1 G:...Some Turks might especially look at the rules as being very rigid or, you know,
2 oppressive but that was *never the case for me* and not the case for millions of others,
3 and a wonderful aspect that I think *a lot of stringently secular Turks* are missing out on
4 is that *being a practicing Muslim*, has enabled me to serve as a cultural ambassador by
5 explaining *our rich* traditions to the Muslim community here in the US. *A lot of Muslims*
6 feel very very connected to Turkey, although *they sometimes do not agree with the*
7 *notion that Islam's depth is not fully embraced in our culture* and of how *secular we are*
8 However they are very open to Turks, *they* really really enjoy meeting *them*, they are
9 very in some ways they, *they* admire so many of *our* traditions and *they* always
10 comment on how rich *our* traditions are and they always feel indebted to Turks...
11 because of the Ottoman Empire and view it has having been the legitimate Calipha...
12 Some feel indebted to Turks because they became Muslim as a result of having
13 exposure to Islam through the Central Asian Turks and so there are so many reasons
14 why many feel so deeply connected to Turkey... and so the number one reason they
15 feel so connected to Turkey is due to Islam, and *as a Turkic American I'm able to speak*
16 *to all these Muslims* here and I'm able to connect with them on so many levels, and it's
17 just such a rewarding experience because, you, know *I can get a better glimpse into*
18 *how they view, the world and in some way I'm better able to be an ambassador to them*
19 *regarding my own culture*, I'm able to introduce *my culture* in a better way *to them*,
20 because they are open to learning... and they are very enthusiastic about learning (My
emphasis).

¹⁰² See Appendix 2.

Gamze comes from a complex background and her case is a clear example of how super-diversity (Vertovec, 2006; 2007a; 2007b; Blommaert, and Varis, 2011) comes into play in the making of collective identities in the contemporary Turkish American context. The use of traditional labels to describe a situation characterized by extreme diversity is challenging, and this is also evident from the italicized expressions above. In the extract Gamze starts by identifying herself as a Turk. After a few lines (line 3), however, she re-discusses her position by distancing herself from “stringently” secular Turks and by doing so she implicitly subscribes to a “moderate” form of secularism — which she also confirms further below (line 7) — that is directly related to her religious background. Within an American Muslim context, however, Gamze, in a similar way, stresses her Turkishness and takes distance from non-secular Islamic groups living in the US (lines 6-7). My informant, thus, clearly positions herself from time to time with different categories that she interestingly presents as relatively opposed to each other. Gamze, in fact, is not able to define her belonging solely on the basis of categories such as “Turkish”, “American” or “Muslim”, for instance, but every label she uses seems to reflect only to a certain extent her identification with a certain group as she constantly needs to further specify, to establish a difference. This strategy is also very visible in the last part of the extract where my informant, on the one hand, referring to herself as a Turkic American, identifies as a Sunni Muslim but, on the other, promptly reaffirms her secularism by referring to Turkish culture as her own.

The case of Gamze is quite exceptional. In the current conjuncture especially, however, people do not enact only one identity but they often perform different and sometimes apparently contrasting identities that, as in the case of my interviewees in general and of Gamze in particular, can be explained only by looking at their statements and behaviors as a combination of micro-hegemonic discourses¹⁰³ regulating different “social spheres” or “niches” of their lives. Or, in other words:

An individual life-project so becomes a dynamic (i.e. perpetually adjustable) complex of micro-hegemonies within which subjects situate their practices and behavior. Such complexes — we can call them a ‘repertoire’ — are not chaotic, and people often are not at all ‘confused’ or ‘ambivalent’ about their choices, nor appear to be ‘caught between’ different cultures or ‘contradict themselves’ when speaking about different topics. The complex of micro-hegemonies just provides a different type of order, a complex order composed of different niches of ordered behavior and discourses about behavior.

The combination of such micro-hegemonized niches, thus, is ultimately what would make up 'the' identity of someone. But already it is clear that identity as a singular notion has outlasted its usefulness — people define their 'identity' (singular) in relation to a multitude of different niches — social 'spheres' in Bakhtin's famous terms¹⁰⁴ — and this is a plural term. One can be perfectly oneself while articulating sharply different orientations in different domains of life or on different issues. (Blommaert, and Varis, 2011: 3)

What might seem apparent inconsistencies, therefore, should be rather regarded as micro-hegemonic discourses regulating specific aspects of Gamze's existence, and she actually agrees with me on this point; even though her identity "is composed of several dimensions which might be considered contradictory by some... [in fact] they are completely complementary" to her (Gamze). As was seen in the email extract opening this chapter, according to Gamze there is a certain tendency to make sense of the Turkish (it is telling of her position that she uses the word Turkish rather than Turkic or Turkish/Turkic American) situation¹⁰⁵ in terms of a political polarization; people are either secular or conservative. This perspective, nevertheless, is quite simplistic and Gamze herself finds it difficult to apply this view to her case; "Whether [she] subscribe[s] to ATAA's philosophy is not a "yes" or "no" one", she later wrote me, trying to explain her situation. Her "views are not structured in the same exact mold as the policies of ATAA or ATA" but at the same time she also does not completely distance herself from the association, and in this respect the observations regarding Gamze's inscribed political and religious identity above can be meaningful. An apparent ambiguity, furthermore, can be observed also when Gamze started talking about her ex-husband. As can be seen below, also in that case she interchanged labels such as "Turkish" and "Cherkez" (i.e. Circassian¹⁰⁶) apparently without making any clear distinction between them.

¹⁰³ "Micro-hegemonic discourses are discourses regulating not the whole existence but just specific aspects of subjects' life and behaviors (Blommaert, and Varis, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (part of *The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981) Bakhtin uses the term "*sphere*" to designate niches of meaning through which people make sense of all phenomena. Phenomena acquire meaning only in relation to specific spheres of human existence. In the essay, for instance, Bakhtin refers to consumption and ideological spheres (211) as well as to "forbidden and unofficial spheres of human life" such as the ones of sexual and corporal functions (165-6).

¹⁰⁵ This might suggest that Gamze perceives this polarized view a peculiarity of people who come from Turkey. She establishes, therefore, an implicit difference based on ascribed political identity between Turks and Turkish/Turkic Americans.

¹⁰⁶ Gamze (line 3) originally said "Turkasian" rather than Circassian but since I had confused Chechez (Turkish word for Circassian) with Cherchen (a term referring to Turkic people from the Xinjiang region of China), when I went back to her for her comments on the section I had written about her, she removed the term — probably to avoid further misunderstandings — and also added the English word "Circassian". By using the word Cherchez,

Extract 13

- 1 I: And okay, if it is not too private, may I ask you if you married an American, a Turkish
- 2 guy or...
- 3 G: I married a Turkish guy and he was actually of Circassian descent, Cherkez.
- 4 I: okay...
- 5 G: Ha ha, so he actually an interesting case study, because *laughter* he mmm also
- 6 grew up, well he grew up in Turkey and he was also *like me exposed to two cultures*, so
- 7 well, I was exposed to the American culture he was exposed to the Turkish culture,
- 8 and for him that was the new way of life in that sense, for his family and all that, *but*
- 9 *his family assimilated more so than mine ever did and, I think that, obviously because*
- 10 *Turkey is a Muslim country and mmm and Turkish culture is far more similar to their*
- 11 *own culture than the American culture is mmm to, ours, you know my culture, that*
- 12 makes sense... (My emphasis.)

Analyzing the extract above, the complexity of Gamze's patterns of identification is evident. First Gamze introduced her ex-husband as a Turk of Turkasian/Circassian descent. As she gave this reply to my question of whether her former partner was Turkish, American or "something else", her answer might be considered to suggest that Cherkez identity can be considered quite similar to Turkish identity — to the eyes of a foreigner like me at least. Her specification, however, at the same time also entails a difference: i.e. being Cherkez for Gamze is not exactly like being Turkish; at least as she makes sense of Turkishness in a different sphere. Gamze, in fact, highlights this aspect when she explains that during his life, her partner was exposed to two different cultures. In his case, therefore, Turkish and Cherkez culture are presented as somehow different despite a common background. The situation, however, changes again when Gamze starts talking about herself (line 6). Exactly like her former partner, she claims that she was "exposed to two cultures": the Turkish and the American one. This statement on the one hand seems to suggest that in her particular case Gamze makes no substantial distinction between her Turkish and Turkic background. On the other hand, however, after a few seconds, through the use of the possessives "their" and "ours" she stresses again the difference between her and her ex-husband's backgrounds. She also emphasizes "THEIR" (see Appendix 2) to make a clear distinction between her and her former partner's cultural identity. Later, when I returned to Gamze with the section I had written about her, she, however, explained to me that this ambiguity is to a great extent due to

making use, thus, of particular language resources, Gamze implicitly positioned herself as a Turk and assumed, at the same time, that I could master the same linguistic and contextual resources as her.

the position of Circassians within the Turkic context. The Cherkez, in fact, are not Turkic people; they come from the Caucasus and they resemble Turkic peoples in many ways, but their Turkicness is still a matter of debate according to Gamze. Almost at the end of the extract it is also quite interesting to observe that Gamze defined Turkish culture as the culture of her family, while she recognizes American culture as something completely foreign. As I mentioned above, however, her choice to be represented here as a “good” English speaker implicitly signals her will to be identified as a highly educated migrant, or, considering her life trajectory, as a “non-migrant”, thus, as a (Turkish Turkic) American.

5.4.6 CEM: FEELING IN-BETWEEN TURKS LIVING IN THE US AND TURKISH AMERICANS

A few days after I had met Adnan, he introduced me to Cem. Cem was one of his good friends in Washington D.C. and like Gamze, he also had quite a complex family background. His great-grandfather had Uzbek origins but, Cem explained to me, in the 1920s, after his death during an action against the Communists, his grandfather and grandmother decided to escape to Adana, Turkey, and it is there that his father and his uncles and aunts were born. Afterwards most of his family got dispersed and while his father lived between Ankara and Uzbekistan, he also had some very successful relatives in Germany. His brothers, instead, had a very transnational profile: they all went to the US with Cem as teenagers but then moved to different countries and while the eldest spent some years in Australia for his PhD and then moved back to Turkey, the other brother stayed in Russia for a while and then fell in love with a Finnish girl and moved to Stockholm, Sweden. Cem’s mother, on the other hand, was born in a small city in southern Anatolia and after having spent a short time in the US together with her children — as life in America was, as Cem put it, too “lonely” for her — she moved to Istanbul where also one of his brothers and his sister were living at the time. Cem instead decided to stay in the US and from what I could understand, had no other close family members living in the country at the moment. For sure, however, one of his uncles had a bar in Georgetown when he was younger and another uncle (or perhaps the same) had just started a film business in America.

The story of how Cem and his family arrived to the US is quite mysterious, or at least this is how it first appeared to me. One day his father simply brought his mother and children to Virginia, bought a car and a house for them and then the day after left for Turkey, leaving his family behind. Cem was about thirteen at the time. Living without his father was not something new for him as the man was constantly travelling for his job, importing energy

from Central Asia to Turkey and also being involved in some construction business, but Cem could not really tell or did not want to tell me why the whole family moved in less than 24 hours. He simply mentioned that his father probably wanted to give his sons better educational opportunities but when I tried to go in depth into the topic, Cem answered in a very vague way that discouraged me to ask him further questions on the matter, including eventual visa issues his family may have faced at the time. I discovered only later that this unwillingness actually was a reflection of my own unwillingness to discuss and share private family issues. There was no mystery, in fact, in Cem's story; "[he] wasn't trying to ignore [my] question about the reason why [they] moved to the US so sudden" and "no political reasons for [them] moving to the US at the time". He would have actually explained me that behind his family move there were some troubles between his parents, but since I did not explicitly ask, he simply did not consider it relevant to deepen the issue at the time of our interview. In any case, Cem grew up in the US with his siblings. During college, he told me later, he was president of a Turkish student association connected with ATAA. From his perspective, however, the Assembly should have focused more on lobbying rather than on gatherings and after that experience his contacts with the association came to an end. After university, then, instead of looking for other jobs he decided to keep working as a bartender and when I first met him he was behind the counter at one of the most glamorous bars of the city. He was happy with what he had, he explained to me, and he was not even thinking of going back to Turkey unless his family offered him some very good opportunity. The first years in the US, he admitted, had been very difficult for him. Getting to know a new culture and a new language, having no friends and attending a boarding school had been a challenging experience. After about 15 years in the US, however, Cem felt completely integrated. He did not care anymore about the possibility of finding pork in his dish as he did at the beginning, and he was celebrating all the Turkish as well as all the mainstream American holidays such as Christmas and Thanksgiving. Going back to Turkey now would have required him to get used to the country again. Furthermore, he still had to do his military service and at the moment he was taking care of the issue, trying to find some kind of an alternative to going back for military service. He did not explain this in any detail, but in practice this probably meant that he was preparing the necessary papers to ask for exemption from the military service in lieu of a payment since the Turkish law allows it since December 2011¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁷ The Bill Amending the Law on Military Service No. 1111 made it possible for Turkish male citizens born after January 1st, 1983 to pay 30,000 TL (about 16.600 USD) in lieu of doing the military service. The bill also allows

From a certain point of view, the case of Cem is very similar to the one of Gamze. The complexity at the basis of his family background and his life trajectory, in fact, have made it very difficult for him to identify with a specific group or label and this emerged quite clearly during our first interview.

Extract 14

I: For you what does it mean being Turkish mmm American? I mean would you define yourself Turkish American or just Turkish or maybe a Turk living in America? I do not know.

Cem: I don't know, like, Turkish American would be a person... like who's... Americanized in this country like, living the lifestyle, like an American, **but**, Turkish BACKGROUND, I mean I have friends who were born here... TURK LIVING IN AMERICA IS... A TURKISH PERSON who came here at a certain age, still have the same character, and the culture of a TURK, that's living in Turkey **but** living in the STATES.

I: ha ha...

C: mmm I'm probably right in between like, I wouldn't say I'm, Turkish American, or a Turk still living in the United States like, I live like, American, *but* I still have like... I mean I still have like... my culture, and I try to follow it so... I would say like it's a combination of both things...

I: So you think for example Turkish Americans are more Americanized?

C: Right, they are more Amamericanized like... they are, they speak the language, just like an American, *the only thing is* like if they go to Turkey, they would go there as a tourist, not as a Turk, you know... like the other way... for them... in Turkey is like they would have like to learn, that's the Turkish American... like a Turk living in America is like they know about things, they grow up with it **but** then they learned to be an American.

I: okay, yes...

C: So...

I: Can you make me some practical examples, for example?

C: yeah like my friend... mmm his name is Ali and like... he was born here... and mmm like he didn't go back to Turkey for long time... he basically didn't speak any Turkish until, he was like thirteen fourteen, then he learned *but* even now like... like it's not perfect, it's not just that it's like he likes to celebrate Christmas, like all those, things like they celebrate in the United States, almost how they didn't, he doesn't care like about the Turkish holidays and stuff, *but* now like he does because of respect... *but*... as it's like ME, me I... I still

celebrate all the, the holidays like the Turkish holidays that we have, *even though* I, I celebrate the, like Christmas and Thanksgiving too cause I'm here living, I'm, I'm gonna enjoy, what I'm gonna do mmm both them... (My emphasis)

Cem's narration is structured through oppositions: Turkish Americans are basically people who behave like Americans who, however, have a Turkish background, while Turks living in the US are persons living in the US who, nevertheless, keep living their lives as Turks. Cem, thus, as a Turk who learned to behave like Americans, feels right in between the two categories. Here, identity seems to have almost no connection with "blood" and family background and in this respect it is also significant that Cem, despite his father's origins, openly refuses to identify as an Uzbek; having been born in Turkey, in fact, he has nothing in common with "anybody" from Uzbekistan but he has "all the characteristics of a Turkish man". This however, as in the case of Turkish Americans, rather than being a characteristic related to soil should be regarded as consequence of education, of getting used to the ways of doing of people within a specific local context. On the one hand, in fact, "who people are", for Cem, mainly is as a matter of practice, of what people do or do not do in order to identify and be identified with a specific group (see Chapter 3) — for instance eating pork, speaking a specific language, celebrating certain holidays. On the other hand identity, however, also seems to be an issue of voice; of the capability that people have to appropriate and perform specific identity discourses and therefore probably Cem at first refused to define himself solely as a Turk or a Turkish American. He later changed his mind, however, and during our last contact he referred to himself as a Turkish American, explaining his choice of using this label in terms of taste, of practices of consumption. While his friend Adnan (see 5.4.2) only watches Turkish soccer, he loves "watching both American football and soccer" and this — even if meant as a joke — qualifies him as a Turkish American per distinction both from Turks and Americans.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

Who are Turkish Americans? This section is the outcome of an explorative study. Starting from the assumption that the identity discourses I observed in the previous chapter are not representative of single individuals, but rather express the interests of power lobbies detaining or willing to detain political, financial and cultural power, I went to Washington D.C. with the aim of observing how individuals who participate in different ways and to different degrees in one of those groups give meaning to themselves as Turkish Americans. After

having analyzed what Turkish Americanness means to two more or less powerful organizations, here I mainly wanted to point at the complexity of the Turkish American situation by showing how different variables such as family and individual history, gender, social position and religion influence the way different individuals belonging to a group presenting itself as apparently homogenous, construct themselves in relation to different contexts. Here I was not interested in focusing on specific isolated themes such as religion or politics, but my main aim was to draw a general and more comprehensive picture of the aspects of Turkish Americanness that the informants themselves made relevant during our interactions.

Due to the wide framing of this study I found myself getting into contact with individuals with very heterogeneous backgrounds, making it undesirable to make generalized observations (also, if my aim would have been to arrive at generalizations, methodologically that would have required a higher number of interviews). I would like to emphasize, however, that the main aim of this study was not to draw broad generalizations but, on the contrary, its purpose was to problematize identification with a label (i.e. Turkish American) within a precise group (i.e. members and sympathizers of ATA-DC in January 2012 that defined themselves or were defined by others as Turkish American).

However, my informants' life trajectories also had some similarities that significantly influenced their way of looking at Turkish Americanness and positioning themselves within different domains. The stories of Adnan, Esra and Elif, for instance, are quite similar in certain respects: they were all born to Turkish families and grew up in Turkey during the religious revival until the first years of the 2000s; they moved to the US to pursue a better education, and then for different reasons decided to stay there. Their lives certainly took different directions at later stages, but interestingly in all their cases the initial phase of their trajectory brought them to highly problematize their position as Turkish Americans and to consider the issue from different perspectives. In this respect, thus, having (or not having) the green card or American citizenship for instance is very meaningful to them for considering their position, at least within the legal domain. They all, furthermore, seem to consider relevant the fact of living in the US since a certain period, to see their future there and basically to have established their lives in that country. Quite predictably, then, compared to the other interviewees, Adnan, Esra and Elif are the ones who seem to see their political position as more relevant while Gamze and Cem, who grew up in the US, are much less interested in discussing secularism or Islamism in Turkey as well as among Turkish Americans. It can also

be observed that in all cases beliefs and behaviors, as was established in Chapter 3, were very relevant in shaping the way my participants identify themselves. Words like “culture”, “values” and “mentality” thus recurred various times during the interviews.

Keeping in mind that this book wants to describe and analyze a whole range of possibilities as regards Turkish Americanness, let us now move to a completely different site to see how literature can be used for investigating society and, more specifically, identities.

CHAPTER 6

IDENTITY REPERTOIRES IN LITERATURE

THE MAKING OF TURKISH AMERICAN IDENTITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Collective identities, as multi-voiced, often intersecting and antagonistic discursive practices (see Hall, 2000) can be observed and investigated from very different perspectives. Analyzing the discourses issued by institutional actors within the Turkish American context, as we have seen in Chapter 4, is one of the possible approaches to the issue. There are, however, also other relevant discourses circulating in the public sphere that are not necessarily related to the interests of particular groups but that no doubt have an important role in the making of identities and identity repertoires. Different art forms — music, cinema, figurative art, literature etc. — offer those discourses a way to be heard.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the making of Turkish Americanness through the discourses emerging from popular novels written by Turkish American and transnational authors who self-identify as persons with Turkish origins. To this end I have chosen to analyze two novels by Elif Shafak, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004) and *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), one novel by Elif Batuman, *The Possessed* (2010), and one by Alev Lytle Crouther, *Seven Houses* (2002). All the works I analyze in this chapter have been written by female authors and it is certainly very interesting that within the “Turkish American” context it is mainly possible to find women writers. I did not want, however, to overstress this point because focusing on this detail — as much as focusing on the in/ascribed Turkish Americanness of the writers — would actually imply, as I will explain in more detail below, an essentialization of their literary production. Furthermore, within this context there would not have even been male authors to possibly compare their works with.

While all the other writers considered in this chapter define themselves, or have been defined by others, as Turkish American, Elif Shafak is quite a peculiar case. In the past, she lived for a

few years in the US and between the US and Turkey, but her personal biography and her recent statements actually suggest that she has a much more transnational profile. Born in Strasbourg (1971) to Turkish parents, she spent her early life between Turkey, Spain and Jordan. Later she moved to Boston and then to Arizona, going back and forth from Turkey. According to the English version of her website, Shafak is actually living between Istanbul and London, where she frequently works for *The Guardian*, reporting on controversial issues related to Turkey ("Biography"). Interestingly, in the Turkish version of the same website, there is no explicit mention of the writer's life in the UK.

The cases of Elif Batuman and Alev Lytle Croutier — or Alev Aksoy Croutier — are quite different. The former was born in 1977 in the US from Turkish parents. After having received a doctoral degree from Stanford University, Batuman moved to Turkey where she currently has a writer-in-residence position at Koç University. The latter, instead, was born in 1944 in Izmir and when she was eighteen she moved to the US to study at an American university. Afterwards Alev Lytle Croutier started working as a filmmaker and writer and spent a part of her life moving between Japan and Europe. Later she moved back again to the US where she founded a publishing house.

Below, before undertaking the analysis of the literary artifacts selected, I would first like to make some theoretical observations on the role of literature in making and sharing collective identities, and give additional information on the selection and interpretation of the data.

6.2 THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN MAKING AND SHARING IDENTITY DISCOURSES

The consequences of identity politics for how people understand and conceive literature have become very evident in recent years, and the progressive emergence of labels such as "migrant literature" or "Muslim literature" are clear examples of this phenomenon. The idea that the work of authors belonging to marginalized groups or cultures within society should be considered as representative of specific collective identities is, in fact, quite widely spread and the many festivals dedicated to "migrant literature"¹⁰⁸, for instance, or the recurrent use of labels such as "Muslim women literature" or "gay literature" for categorizing books illustrate this tendency quite clearly. The essentialization of the literary production of minorities and the ghettoization of certain categories within the arts, however, is not the

¹⁰⁸ For instance: the *Geo-grafie* festival in Camogli, Italy; the *Winternachten* festival in The Hague, The Netherlands; the *Gioco degli Specchi* festival in Trento, Italy; and the *Adelbert von Chamisso* prize in Frankfurt, Germany.

direction identity studies should lead toward when claiming the relevance of literature in making and sharing identities.

Elif Shafak, during an interview in 2009, describes the relationship between her cultural identity and her fiction in the following way:

I am a Turkish writer and I feel deeply connected with my culture. But at the same time I am a world citizen. I commute between languages the way I commute between cultures. I am a commuter, a nomad. For me writing fiction is about “journeys” anyhow. It is possible to be local and universal all at once. Like a compass. One leg of the compass is fixed and stable, it is local. The other leg draws a huge wide circle and travels the world. It is universal. This is how I see my fiction. (Shafak, 2009)

In the quote above Shafak clearly positions herself as a transnational author, transcending the borders of national, linguistic and cultural belonging while maintaining a strong relationship also with a more local context. In this respect, the parallelism that she draws between this attitude and her profession is particularly interesting: storytelling as a creative effort of sharing and taking, in fact, seems to be what makes her and her work universal. “Identity politics”, says Shafak during her TED Talk in 2010, “divide us. Fiction connects”. Her moving across boundaries should be understood in this light. Shafak is a transnational author because of her biography, of the identities she performs in different contexts, of her being a bilingual writer, of her novels being translated into more than thirty languages or of her being a public intellectual¹⁰⁹ in different countries. She also can be considered a transnational figure due to the fact that she is an author. This is because fiction, as the result of an act of imaginative freedom, transcends the boundaries of identity politics and positions the author as someone who, though belonging somewhere, is free from constraints of any kind. From this perspective not only Shafak, but literary authors in general might be considered transnational, as fiction gives them the possibility to move through imagination across geographical, linguistic and cultural borders: of being basically anyone else (see Nussbaum, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ From a broad perspective a public intellectual can be defined as a specialist who addresses in an accessible way a broad public on ethical and political issues of general interest. Today, as a consequence of a larger debate on the disappearance of the public sphere as a place where issues of public concern can be discussed without restrictions, the existence of public intellectuals has been questioned by scholars such as Posner (2003) and Judt (2008). Heynders (2009), nevertheless, observes that since the '90s literary texts are focusing more and more on political and social issues and that today it is actually possible to look at certain authors as public intellectuals. For further details on the tension between the social engagement and the autonomy of literary works see Heynders (2009).

The point, thus, is not whether literature might or might not eventually represent specific cultures, ethnicities or nationalities but rather *what literature might do* in society; that is, not mirroring but rather producing and sharing discourses and identity repertoires. An example from the literary production of Elif Shafak will help illustrate this point.

In 2006, the court case of Elif Shafak received a lot of media attention. When the author was accused by a group of ultra-nationalists of having violated the 301 article of the Turkish penal code by insulting Turkishness through the words of one of the characters of her latest novel, the news immediately exploded on the pages of all the main international newspapers, opening a debate on freedom of speech, art and politics. After some months the allegations against Shafak were dropped by the judge as no relevance was found to the charge in the documents presented by the prosecutor. Literature, as an act of imaginative freedom, was considered by the court to be of no use for evaluating the personal opinions of the author. What is interesting for the purposes of this study, however, is not the final sentence of the judge, but rather the ultra-nationalists' preoccupations at the basis of the whole episode. Literature is not only something that may circulate widely at all levels of society (or societies) over time and space but, as multi-voiced, it also has the power of spreading plural discourses intersecting and concurring with others in shaping the imagination of people and creating identity repertoires. Let us see now in more detail how artworks contribute to the making and sharing of meanings in society. For this purpose, I will briefly discuss some of the most relevant theoretical works investigating the issue.

Richard Hoggart, generally considered to be one of the founding fathers of Cultural Studies¹¹⁰, published a book entitled *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) through which he investigated the effects that the consumption of "popular" or "mass" art had on the way people lived and gave meaning to the world. At the time his work had very important consequences, among which was drawing a new perspective on the way culture is conceived. Approaching it as "practice of 'making sense'" rather than as the best which has ever been said or written by wo/men, he established the theoretical basis for British Cultural Studies which came to life just a few years after the publication of his book (Hall, 2007: 43).

¹¹⁰ In 1964 Hoggart founded the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. Before working as director at the Center, however, he also published the volume discussed below — *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) — which is considered by some scholars, including Stuart Hall (2007), to have played a considerable role in the development of the discipline.

According to Hall (2007) Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) contributed to drive the attention of the academia from texts to readers and to the role they play in interpreting and experiencing literature. Although the historical and theoretical importance of Hoggart's work cannot be denied, the book today can only be considered as a further step for the understanding of the relation existing between art and society¹¹¹. More than fifty years since the book's publication, the issue is still widely discussed and there is no common agreement on how literary artifacts and society should be linked. Questions like "*What might art, and consequently literature, really do to people?*" or "*What are its uses or abuses?*" are still looking for answers and the publication of more recent studies covering the topic shows this quite clearly¹¹². In recent decades, it has become clear that these and similar questions necessarily go hand in hand with further considerations about the singularity of literature and the role that ideology might play in the creation and diffusion of art.

After a bit more than half a century later, Rita Felski — editor of *New Literary History*, one of the most prestigious journals of literary theory — in a manifesto of clear Hoggartian inspiration entitled *Uses of Literature* (2008), moves across Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies and, taking into account diverse theoretical positions, draws a new perspective on the functions that literary artifacts might have in society. According to Felski, within the academia it is currently possible to recognize two main attitudes toward literature and, while some scholars firmly believe in a *theological* style of reading, others, quite differently, rather encourage an *ideological* understanding of literary texts. While the first, thus, "claim for literature's other-worldly aspects", the second, on the other hand, regards texts as "symptoms of social structures or political causes" (Felski, 2008: 4-6). Or, in other words, while some literary critics look at literature as something completely separated from the world — "literature is useless" — others consider it to be inextricably tied to society and its way of functioning. From Felski's perspective, however, both the positions are questionable as they both ignore important features that characterize literature both as a cultural artifact as well as a process through which meaning is created. She writes:

Separating Literature from everything around it, critics fumble to explain how works of art arise from and move back into the social world. Highlighting literature's uniqueness, they

¹¹¹ In 1938 Kenneth Burke, for instance, wrote the essay *Literature as Equipment for Living*, asking questions similar to the ones posed by Hoggart. Already Plato can be considered to have discussed the issue, exploring the relation between art and truth in *The Republic* as well as in *Ion*.

overlook the equally salient realities of its connectedness. Applauding the ineffable and enigmatic qualities of works of art, they fail to do justice to the specific ways in which such works infiltrate and inform our lives. [...]To read in such a way, it turns out, means assenting to a view of art as impervious to comprehension, assimilation, or real world consequences [...]. (Felski, 2008: 5)

From Felski's perspective, a conception of literature that does not take into account its social aspect or 'use' is considerably reductive. At the same time, however, she is also critical of pure ideological readings. By contrast, even if such an approach certainly has the merit of placing art within society, it also transforms it into a static object, denying it any active function. Literature, from this perspective, is regarded as a mirror reflecting the specific social and power structures of the environment within which it was produced, and both the uniqueness of the reading experience as well as the transforming potentialities of literary artifacts are denied. Felski writes that "[t]o define literature as ideology is to have decided ahead of time that literary works can be objects of knowledge but never sources of knowledge" (2008: 7). Or, to put it otherwise, ideological readings do not take into account the complexity of literature as a cultural artifact shaped by, and at the same time shaping, the environment within which it is produced and experienced.

Felski, as a result of the partiality and one-sidedness of their interpretations, questions both theological and ideological readings of literature and proposes an alternative approach "to either strong claims for literary otherness or the whittling down of texts to bare bones of political and ideological function" that is not a fusion of the two perspectives, but rather a completely new way of looking at texts (2008: 7). Cultural studies and Reception Studies, Felski observes, have shown quite clearly that literary artifacts might acquire very different meanings according to the particular context within which they are experienced. Authors, in fact, have been shown to have relatively little control over the reception of their works, while readers might actually make sense of texts in a variety of different ways. Literary artifacts offer themselves to multiple interpretations and within literary criticism scholars such as Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, and Roland Barthes already wrote on the issue, pointing at art's endless possibilities of semiosis (Felski, 2008). The idea that the meaning of a communicative act is strongly dependent on how a certain discourse is understood is relevant

¹¹² For instance Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), some of the works by the neurologist Lisa Zunshine such as *Theory of Mind and Experimental Representations of Fictional Consciousness* (2003) and *Why we Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2008), as well as Felski's *The Uses of Literature* (2008).

in Literary Criticism as well as in Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (see Chapter 3). What Felski proposes in her manifesto, is a “historical” (2008: 9) approach to literature that actually is quite similar to the concept of contextualization that I have described in Chapter 3 with respect to Blommaert and CDA: she emphasizes the relevance of considering literature in terms of what it means to people in the specific context they are positioned in. Arts, she writes, “continue to signify, continue to invite other readings” and “such an historical embedding” requires critics “to think through her own relationship to the text she is reading. Why has this work been chosen for interpretation? How does it speak to me now? What is its value in the present?” (Felski, 2008: 10-11). It is clear, therefore, that *reflexivity* (see Chapter 3) is a fundamental requirement also for reading art. From this perspective, in fact, there is no crucial difference between discourse analysis and literary criticism. “Texts”, writes Felski (2008: 18), “are unable to act directly on the world, but only via the intercession of those who read them”. The focus of her approach, then, shifts from the artwork to its readers and more specifically to the conditions that allowed them to bring certain interpretations and meanings into society.

Starting from “popular” intuitions, Felski analyzes the interactions between artworks and readers and recognizes four main “modes of textual engagement” that, despite clear differences, share “certain cognitive and affective parameters” with literary criticism (2008: 14). Claiming that reading is a process through which people might experience “recognition”, “enchantment”, “knowledge” and “shock”, she underlines how these “uses” can be regarded as being actually close to important aesthetic categories such as anagnorisis, beauty, mimesis and the sublime. Felski’s work, however, as she writes, “is not a populist defense of folk reading over scholarly interpretations” (2008: 14), but rather, introducing the four uses mentioned above, her aim is to show how “ordinary intuitions are a valuable starting point for reflecting on *why literature matters*” (2008: 15. My emphasis).

Felski describes “recognition” as a process through which reading inspires new visions of the self — a re-shaping of one’s identity — while “enchantment” depicts the readers’ “disturbing failure to differentiate between fact and fantasy” (2008: 53). “Knowledge”, then, points at the meaning-making potentials and the social relatedness of literary artifacts, and “shock” refers to the capability of art to break taboos and familiar schemes of reference. In this chapter it is not my intention to go into the details of all the uses of literature discussed by Felski, but

rather I will focus on those processes, which are particularly useful for this study, i.e. “enchantment” and “knowledge”¹¹³.

Enchantment is certainly a very important function of literature if we consider the impact it might have on society. As I mentioned above, it implies that people mistake “fantasy” for “reality”, or, in other words, that readers consider fiction as something real. In this respect the case of Elif Shafak is quite emblematic. The ultra-nationalists involved in the scandal trial were actually worried about how a book could have been perceived and could have affected the image of Turkey. Art in this case had a huge role — even if involuntarily — in making, reinforcing and sharing a certain kind of discourse about the involvement of the Turkish armies in the Armenian issue. Many readers, as for instance the reviews on Amazon.com show quite clearly¹¹⁴, seem to consider the novel as a reliable and representative resource documenting the events of 1915-1923. A telling example is a comment from the blog of an Italian reader on *The Bastard of Istanbul*. She writes:

The most important issue considered by Shafak in her novel is the Armenian genocide. In some parts of the book we see flashbacks to the past, showing what happened to Armanoush’s family. These scenes are representative of the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Turks during and after WWI. Armanoush’s great-grandfather was a writer, from a wealthy family; he was, therefore, one of the first victims of the massacres. The date chosen in the book is also symbolic: he was deported on 24th April 1915. This is normally considered the starting date for the genocide; for this reason, today 24th April is the Genocide Remembrance Day. (Piccirillo, 2012)

From the extract above it is clear that the blogger is immersed into the novel to the point of having chosen to read it as a representation of reality. The story narrated in the novel is not ‘just a story’ but in this case, for the reader, it has become reality and her interpretation of the facts of 1915 as they are presented in the book is actually shaping her way of looking at and making meaning of the world and more in particular of Turkey. This, however, does not mean

¹¹³ Recognition always implies a re-definition: the acknowledgement of a new perspective on the way we give meaning to ourselves, the others, and ultimately to the world. In this respect, therefore, it can be considered a relevant concept for the purposes of this study. Literature, in fact, might draw new perspectives on Turkish Americanness. Felski, (2008) nevertheless, mainly conceives recognition as a process through which readers learn something about themselves and rather introduces knowledge as a separate function of literature through which people can learn something about the others and the world. For this reason, therefore, recognition has not been taken into account in this study.

Felski probably makes this classification to better define and differentiate the diverse functions that literature might have. The interconnection between knowledge and recognition, however, is clear as any change in the way we give meaning to ourselves also affects the way we look at the world and vice versa.

¹¹⁴ Observed on 11 Feb 2012.

that art — and popular art especially — should be regarded as a tool of ideological constriction or that artists should be held responsible for the stories they narrate. The meaning of literature is always mediated by its readers. Looking at enchantment as something more than an “experience of absorption and self-loss” and considering art as a tool of constriction would actually be a judgment based on class prejudice as it implies the intellectual inferiority and higher conditionability of common readers in relation to scholars (Felski, 2008: 67).

In this study, besides enchantment, another very relevant function of literature is what Felski (2008) refers to as “social knowledge”, i.e. the ability of literary artifacts to reveal us something about the world. Literature, as we saw above, can not only share stories and discourses perceived as “real” by readers, but it also has the capability to share ways of making meaning that are potentially contributing to our predisposition toward the world. Drawing on Ricoeur, Felski points at the mimetic nature of literary works and underlines how they actually rebuild, re-describe and ultimately can give new meaning to things, persons or events. The issue, she explains, is not so much about how literature reflects reality, but rather about how literature re-interprets and re-makes it, bringing different perspectives to our attention (Felski, 2008: 104). The way we approach and look at literature and at the world is already the result of the repertoires of stories, knowledge, and beliefs we “possess”, of the semiotic materials we are familiar with as a result of specific circumstances. It is clear, therefore, that it makes no sense to look at artworks in terms of “reliability” and “realness”. It is possible, however, to look at these as *ways of making sense* which might enter and become part of the resources we rely on for making sense of different experiences.

6.2.2 LITERARY DEVICES AND SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

Felski (2008) points at three mimetic devices through which literature can achieve its effect as a vehicle for social knowledge. She introduces “deep intersubjectivity”, “ventriloquism” and “linguistic still life” as fundamental notions for understanding this process. Let us briefly consider in more detail these devices before further explaining the literary sources which have been used for this study.

Deep intersubjectivity is a device that exclusively belongs to literature and refers to the ability that narrators have to “read minds” and to capture “the intricate maze of perceptions”, feelings and ways of understanding and interpreting through which characters give meaning to themselves, to others and ultimately to the world (Felski, 2008: 91). Through literature

readers can actually become aware of the complexities that performing and interpreting semiotic acts entails, as they have access to multiple universes of interpretation. Or, in Felski's words, the process of reading literature, "as form of context sensitive knowledge conveyed to readers, is more akin to *connaitre* than *savoir*, "seeing as" rather than "seeing that" learning by habituation and acquaintance rather than by instruction" (2008: 93). And this is actually also what Shafak claims in her TED talk when she says that literature connects while identity politics divide. It can be claimed, in fact, that novels, showing diverse ways of making meaning, actually create bridges among people, enhancing their knowledge of reality through acknowledging others' perspective.

According to Felski (2008), another way through which literature mimes reality producing knowledge is through ventriloquism, which is the ability that literary texts have to contain multiple language varieties¹¹⁵. Drawing on Bakhtin — as we have also seen in Chapter 3 — the author claims that differences in the use of language actually index social differences and, through the display of multiple varieties, literature demands "that we adapt to multiple lexicons and modes of expressions that encompass alternative ways of making sense of experience" (Felski, 2008: 94). In this sense, therefore, it is possible to claim that what or who is "seen" in literature is strictly related to how it is described or how s/he takes shape.

The last mimetic device that Felski (2008) introduces for explaining how literature connects to the world and produces social knowledge is "linguistic still lives". These basically are objects or descriptive details that appear in the narration and that, like in the real world, are not devoid of meaning but rather characterize in a significant way the persons own or employ them, and the context within which they are used. As I explained already in Chapter 3, understandings of who we ourselves are and who the Other is, in fact, has to do with semiotic processes that also include consumption and production practices.

On the basis of this last consideration, I would like to underline that for understanding the relation between social knowledge and literature, the whole "circuit of culture" that has been discussed in Chapter 3 is relevant. All the practices that characters are depicted as being engaged in, from their choices to their actions, and the way they regulate their life and their

¹¹⁵ As Felski (2008) notes, ventriloquism is actually very similar to the Bakhtinian notion of polyphony. According to Felski, however, the term has been often abused and washed out of its original meaning; therefore the expression ventriloquism would be preferable.

interactions, are meaningful. Furthermore, it is also relevant how they are positioned in relation to other characters.

6.3 SELECTING THE LITERARY ARTIFACTS

For the purposes of this study, I decided to focus on an analysis of discourses about Turkish Americanness in four novels written by contemporary Turkish American and transnational authors of Turkish origin. The choice of the specific novels has been mainly motivated by the scarce availability of literary resources discussing contemporary Turkish Americanness in the international literary landscape. Turkish Americans, as I explained in the Introduction, are quite a recent group in the US and have started to be visible in the public sphere only recently. At the moment, therefore, it is not possible to find literary resources discussing Turkish Americanness apart from the ones I will analyze in this study. Umut Öztürk, a Turkish migrant living in the US since his childhood, also wrote a novel — *America Hates Me but I Still Love Her* (2003) — that might be considered somehow relevant concerning the creation and the sharing of identity discourses about Turkish Americanness in the American society. Nevertheless, since the author is printing his works with an unknown and not widely distributed self-publishing company, I decided not to include him here as the potential reach of his novels is probably very limited.

The resources have been selected taking into account their impact and their diffusion in the American and in the international context, and therefore widely discussed, translated and reprinted novels that have been written in English have been preferred to others. Furthermore, literary artifacts by popular authors produced by well-established publishing houses have been considered as particularly relevant during the selection as those are more likely to be read by a wider public.

For the purposes of this study novels written by Alev Lytle Croutier, Elif Batuman and Elif Shafak have been examined. In the specific case of Elif Shafak, even if the author cannot be exactly defined as Turkish American — the label transnational would actually better suit her case — she lived for a few years between the US and Turkey and during that period of time she also wrote some interesting novels that can be considered relevant for the purposes of this study. A brief synopsis of the novels analyzed is provided in Appendix 3. The section is mainly meant to guide and help readers not familiar with the books through the analysis of the various identity-relevant discourses I will carry on in the following pages.

6.4 ANALYZING LITERATURE

As said, when I decided to use literature for analyzing the discourses circulating in society(ies) about Turkish American identities I found myself facing some issues related to the peculiar characteristics of the materials I chose. On one hand, it is possible to claim that literary artifacts are actually like any other semiotic resource, “their meaning” directly related to the position that the researcher has while performing her/his interpretation. Nevertheless, on the other hand, analyzing literature is not exactly like analyzing an interview or, for instance, ATAA’s website: authors may not necessarily even want to convey a clear, unambiguous message which people are inclined to do in other types of discourse.

Telling a story might be regarded as just telling a story, and interpreting, in this case, clearly raises questions of positioning; can the researcher still keep an insider’s perspective¹¹⁶ as I tried to do in Chapter 3? Whose perspective should s/he take? Of course on one hand it is possible to adopt an insider’s point of view and try to make sense of the story and its interactions for what they mean to its characters and, eventually, to the narrator. But moving to a “more general” level, the issue is much more complex. Although a novel, as Shafak claims in her TED Talk, is just a novel, the words it is made of, the story it tells, the style of narration used, are actually very meaningful for the ones who read it and interpreters should be aware of the importance of the endlessness of these positions. A Turk, an Armenian or an Italian might give *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007) very different meanings and while for the first the book might be an example of anti-Turkish propaganda, the other two might consider it an important document about the Turkish Armenian issue. A very similar observation can be made, for instance, on the novel *Gomorra* (2006) by the Italian author Saviano. What for some is just an intriguing story, for many is a manifesto denouncing the illegal activities of the Camorra — a branch of the Italian mafia located in the Naples area — and still, for others it has become a dangerous manuscript the author of which should be punished with death¹¹⁷.

Paul De Man, in *Allegories of Reading* (1979), claims that every narrative, as something that is produced through language, can be regarded as an allegory whose meaning is always located outside the text. The referent of this allegory, however, is never fixed but is constantly

¹¹⁶ To keep an insider’s perspective the analyst is supposed to interpret semiotic acts for what they mean to the people who produce them.

¹¹⁷ After the book was published in 2006 Saviano has been threatened by the Camorra.

postponed as every reading produces different “misreadings”¹¹⁸ through which equally valuable meanings are attributed to the text. Ultimately, for De Man (1979), it is language and its ambiguity, however, which lead to misreadings. Therefore, it is not only literature which is open to endless interpretations, but actually this can be claimed about any communicative act. I believe, nevertheless, that the use of the term “misreading”, especially in the case of literature, might be misleading. The case of literature is quite peculiar, first of all, as the language and the expressions it uses often are much more ambiguous than the ones employed by people in other communicative acts. If language users mostly try to make themselves understood, the same cannot be exactly claimed for literary artifacts. Literature is open to meaning and thus readers — or analysts — play even a more important role in attributing sense. As Felski observes, drawing on Ricoeur, even if literary artifacts give access to others’ universe of meaning, “reception is as vital as production” (2008: 87). There are no misreadings in literature, but rather there are potentially infinite yet equally valid ways of making sense of it. Therefore I claim that the use of literature as a resource for analyzing identities puts the interpreter in front of an important issue regarding the possibility of acquiring an insider’s perspective. Ultimately literature, in fact, from a macro point of view, does not have an insider’s space of meaning through which the author’s intention can be understood, but it is open to a variety of ways of making sense of it, all of which are driven by the interpreter’s own position within time, space and society.

6.5 THE MAKING OF TURKISH AMERICANNESSTHROUGH LITERATURE

Defining a Turkish American identity, as is already clear from the previous chapters, is quite challenging as at any given time a huge number of intersecting and contrasting discourses about belonging might circulate in a society. In the following pages, taking into account the whole range of positions we encountered in the previous sections of this study, Turkish Americanness will be analyzed from a very broad perspective. The chapter, therefore, will consider discourses concerning both Turkish migrants living in the US¹¹⁹ as well as Turkish Americans since both these two categories, according to the perspective acquired, might concur to the making of identity repertoires about Turkish Americanness. The sources will not be analyzed one by one but the data have been divided into three thematic sections, each of which focuses on different sets of identity discourses emerging from the analysis of the

¹¹⁸ For De Man (1979), reading always implies a “misreading” as there is always a gap between what is said and what is understood.

¹¹⁹ Some characters have never been labeled as Turkish Americans within the novels.

novels. General considerations regarding the social profile of Turkish Americans will be followed by observations on their integration within the American context and their relationship with Turkey. Finally, on the basis of this literary data, further considerations will be made about Turkish Americanness by analyzing discourses about Islam.

6.5.2 A GENERAL PROFILE OF TURKISH AMERICANS: SOCIAL STATUS, EDUCATION AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

Before analyzing specific discourses on Turkish Americanness, I would like to briefly focus on the general social and educational profile of Turkish Americans appearing in the novels I selected for this study. The relative homogeneity of the discourses concerning the social and educational level of Turkish Americans within literature and their partial divergence from the picture drawn by recent studies in the area is quite interesting.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Turkish migration to the States until the end of the 1970s has been characterized by a majority of highly educated professionals who moved to America to pursue a better education or to find better job opportunities. In recent decades, however, the situation has significantly changed and a phenomenon known as the “Germanification” of Turkish Americans¹²⁰ has started bringing to the US an ever-increasing number of unskilled workers and illegals ¹²¹. As we have seen in Chapter 4, no acknowledgement of these emerging social categories in the overall discourses about Turkish Americanness is promoted by the main Turkish American associations on US soil. A very similar observation can be also made regarding the representation of Turkish Americans in literary works. Despite the changes in migration patterns highlighted by a recent study on the background of migrants moving from Turkey to the US (Saatçi, 2008: 105), the discourses appropriated in *Seven Houses* (2002), *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004), *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007) and *The Possessed* (2010) are very similar in presenting Turkish Americans as generally well-educated, middle-/upper-class individuals coming from generally wealthy secular Turkish families. In the novels, therefore, not only is there absolutely no reference to the new wave of illegal and unskilled workers so carefully described by Lisa Di Carlo (2008) in her ethnographic work on petrol station attendants from the Black Sea, but also, as we will

¹²⁰ The expression has been used for the first time by Akıncı (2002), referring to the increasing migration of unskilled workers from Turkey to the US.

¹²¹ For further readings about Turkish migration to the States see: Akçapar (2006); Di Carlo (2008); Karpas (2008); Kaya (2004; 2007; 2009).

see in the following pages, Muslims and especially non-secular Muslims are completely excluded from view¹²².

Turkish Americans in literature are mostly depicted as highly qualified professionals with PhD students as the only — partial — exception. For an overall picture of the characters in the novels, I will briefly list their professions here. In chronological order, from the first book published to the most recent one, Turkish Americans in the last ten years have been portrayed as architects and very successful typographers (Croutier, 2002), as more or less motivated PhD students at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* — MIT — or engineers (Shafak, 2004), as geologists and “Americanized academics” (Shafak, 2007: 118) and finally again as clever postgraduate students and unspecified employees of a popular medical center (Batuman, 2010). The distinctive features of the individual characters, of course, do not allow for broad generalization, but it is quite evident that the Turkish Americans in these novels clearly belong to a specific social category. Very similar observations, as I anticipated above, can be reasonably made also about their families which all seem to belong or have belonged to the pro-secular elite of modern Turkey. An example of this, probably more clear to Turkish or Turkish American readers, can be found in the very first pages of *The Possessed*, where it is briefly mentioned that the mother of the Turkish American protagonist attended an American school in Ankara (Batuman, 2010: 8), referring to a kind of education that generally is still reserved to the secular Turkish middle and upper class. Similar features seem to characterize also the family of Ömer in *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (Shafak, 2004). After his marriage with Gail, a bipolar¹²³ American girl, Ömer, who is a PhD candidate at MIT, goes back to Istanbul to introduce his spouse to his parents. The quote below describes this event, focusing on the description of Ömer’s mother and of his former house; their physical appearance and small details within the apartment reveal quite clearly the social status of the family and their lifestyle. Again, those particulars are probably much more meaningful to the eyes of an audience familiar with the Turkish social context. Also other readers, nevertheless, might clearly classify Ömer’s family as upper-middle class.

As she handed her plate to Ömer’s mother so that the latter could refurbish it for the fourth time with incredibly assorted food of incredible amounts, Gail moaned, which went

¹²² Felski observes that the novel “registers and reflect on the pervasiveness of social hierarchies” (2008: 93). Therefore, entire categories of people often do not appear or are embodied by flat characters relegated to minor roles.

¹²³ The bipolar disorder is a mental illness characterized by an instable mood where hypomania alternates with episodes of depression.

totally unnoticed amid the jovial fuss at the table. On her left was the father, who didn't look like Ömer at all, and next to him was Ömer's brother, who didn't look like either his father or Ömer. On her right was the mother, an elegant, highly attractive woman who looked far younger than her age with her stylish haircut, bronzed face, and slender, lithe body. The house was located on a beautiful street with spick-and-span apartment buildings in an upper-class neighborhood. From the windows you could watch the sea roll, thick, almost jellylike in its dazzling blue, and Gail could swear this was not the same sea she had been watching from the hotel balcony. The living room was sophisticatedly decorated, upmarket and refined, svelte and chic but so calculatingly distanced from a la mode. There were a few photographs around, and in one of them Gail spotted the cute, serene boy with hurting eyes Ömer once was. The walls were embellished with numerous tastefully framed tasteful paintings, which Gail felt sure were authentic. (Shafak, 2004: 331-32).

In the novel, the high social position of Ömer's family becomes apparent in various occasions through a number of small details — what Felski calls “linguistic still life”¹²⁴ (2008) — that mark its social position. Characters, through their lifestyle choices and preferences, perform certain identities and it is meaningful that in the case of Ömer's parents everything in the house is explicitly depicted as upper-middle class, from the pictures around the house to its beautiful view and its expensive finishing. What is not said by the narrator, who in the last chapters implicitly identifies him/herself as someone who moved to Istanbul (2004: 328), however, in this case is as relevant as what is said, and the description of the mother of the protagonist seems to position the whole family among the secularist elite. Characters with a very conservative Muslim ethos, such as Abed or Zahra, as we can see for instance from the extract below, are usually explicitly depicted as such from the very beginning in the novel (see for instance 2004: 3, 14, 101).

Abed felt a tension descend. He started the engine, hurrying to get away from this mood as quickly as possible. It was odd that such sudden sadness grabbed him on the day of Zahra's arrival.

Even if this cryptic mystery had accompanied him to the airport, he would have forgotten about it entirely the second he caught sight of Zahra, there among a fussy bunch of passengers incapable of standing for ten more minutes in the customs line as if it weren't they who had sat motionless for ten hours of flight, and after a while had become so accustomed to it they could simply keep on flying forever. Unlike them, though, Zahra looked resplendently serene in a pasty white head scarf and a long silky taupe manteau

that either made her look more shortish and plump than usual, or she'd gained weight and shrunk a bit in the meantime. [...] Still struggling with her breathing Zahra looked around inquisitively. The room was pleasant and tidy and to her relief, the windows looked eastward, to welcome the sun the first thing in the morning. She wondered which way Kiba was, but as she turned back to ask, catching a glimpse of the shades spinning in Abed's eyes made her ask instead: "Son, do you sleep well? Any more nightmares?". (Shafak, 2004: 176-79)

Ömer's upper-middle class background within Turkish society is apparent also from the way he is positioned in respect to other Turkish characters. For instance the attitude of lower class workers toward the character when they try to categorize him according to their repertoires is relevant in this respect. In many cases, in fact, as in the case of Elif, social difference seems to be more meaningful than national or linguistic background and Ömer, in the eyes of lower class Turks, is often a "foreigner" as he possesses a set of resources, both linguistic and non-linguistic (e.g. speaking English, but also his overall appearance), that automatically position him as someone outside their group. An example of this can be found in the extract below.

What she [Gail] found the more surprising was to discover that the bellboy would not be the only one to take Ömer for a tourist. Somehow Gail's presence was sufficient to render them both Americans. And yet, Gail also sensed that behind this jumble of appearances wherein all unfamiliar ways and faces were deemed to be equally "foreign", there lay more a structural riddle, some sort of a duality that divided Turkish people in two camps. On the one hand, there were the more educated, the more affluent, and far more sophisticated who were irrefutably Western and modern: and then there was a second group of people, greater in numbers, less in power, less *Western* in appearance. The discrepancy in between could transfer the members of the former bunch into "tourists" in the eyes of the latter group. A Turk could easily look like a *foreigner* to another Turk. (Shafak, 2007: 330. Emphasis original)

The particular cases of Ömer and Elif are undoubtedly quite significant as regards the social status of Turkish Americans in literature. The upper middle-class position and the pro-secular orientation of the families of origin of the Turkish American characters is, however, even clearer in the stories at the core of *Seven Houses* (2002) and *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007). These novels, narrating the fortunes of multiple generations of individuals within the same family, present quite detailed accounts of the economic successes of the families and the pro-

¹²⁴ It can be observed that these details have an indexical meaning as they position Ömer's family within Turkish society.

secular attitudes of their members. In *Seven Houses* the family of Amber, for instance, is described by the narrator as being directly involved in the war of independence and in this context the women especially, with their modern appearance and in certain cases with their educational and career aspirations, are portrayed as being among the very first exponents of the kemalist cultural and economic elite of the time. Similarly, then, also in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007) the family of Mustafa Kazancı, a geologist working in Arizona, is depicted as closely connected to the immediate post-independence years of the republic. The economic fortune of the Kazancıs in fact lies in a flag business founded in the late 1920s in the wake of the nationalist enthusiasm. Here it is again through the still life description — indexical meanings — of the physical appearance and wardrobe choices of the women of the family that the modernity and the secular attitudes of Mustafa's family become more evident; except for Banu, who started practicing Islam after a troubled period in her life, all the Kazancıs, are, in their own way, expressions of different kinds of secularisms, from the neo-kemalist teacher of geography to the sassy tattoo artist, and from the authoritative matriarch to the great-grandmother who, during her youth, was among the elite of the new republic.

6.5.3 POSITIONING TURKISH AMERICANNES IN RELATION TO THE OTHERS: DISCOURSES ABOUT INTEGRATION AND ESTRANGEMENT

Integration discourses are excellent resources for investigating Turkish American identities, as they necessarily imply a process of exclusion and differentiation through which identities are positioned and defined in relation to at least two meaningful Others corresponding in this case to the Turks and the Americans. In the following, therefore, the making of Turkish Americanness will be analyzed in relation both to discourses regarding their (non)Americanness and (non)Turkishness. As in the previous section, also in this case it is possible to observe substantial homogeneity in the way Turkish Americans are defined in relation to the Other; even if each character is portrayed to experience these differences in slightly different ways, their assimilation within the US and their general estrangement from Turkish culture can be considered to be recurrent themes across the novels.

In *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), such discourses about Turkish Americanness are issued by different characters and in this respect a dialogue between Armanoush, Mustafa's stepdaughter, and some of her Armenian Internet friends is particularly interesting. The girl, expressing her thoughts regarding her forthcoming trip to Istanbul, gives the way to a brief series of interesting considerations that juxtapose local and American Turks in relation both

to their educational background and their dispositions toward nationalism and the recognition of the Armenian genocide.

- 1 "It puzzles me how I will be received by *ordinary* Turks. A real Turkish Family, not one
 - 2 of those Americanized academics".
 - 3 "What are you going to talk about with ordinary Turks?" asked Lady Peacock/Si-
 - 4 ramark. "Look, even the well-educated are either nationalists or ignorant. Do you
 - 5 think ordinary people will be interested in accepting historical truths? Do you think
 - 6 they are going to say: Oh yeah, we are sorry we massacred and deported you guys
 - 7 and then contentedly denied it all. Why do you want to get yourself in trouble?"
- (Shafak, 2007: 118. Emphasis original)

The difference the Armenian character sees between Turks and American Turks is immediately evident in the first lines of the extract (1-2). Turkish Americans are defined here firstly on the basis of their non-Turkishness. The inauthenticity of the American Turks in this case, however, does not seem to be connected to their non-native language skills in Turkish as in Chapter 5, but rather to their educational background and their overall assimilation within the American mainstream culture; something that, nevertheless, does not allow them to be referred to just as "Americans". While the differentiation of American Turks from 'authentic' Turks appears in the first part of the extract, at the same time it is also clear from the words of Lady Peacock that Turkish Americans still have features that make them non-American and similar, to some extent, to the general image of Turks in the transnational pro-Armenian propaganda (see McCarthy, 2010: 105-57, 287-93). The way Lady Peacock looks at Turkish Americanness, in fact, seems to be directly connected to other discourses outside the novel generally issued by Armenians about Turks; American Turks are depicted here, thus, as radical nationalists or at least as completely disinterested toward the "survivor" narratives on the historical developments of the late 1910s; a kind of a picture that actually reflects quite accurately the identity discourses promoted also by ATAA on its website (see Chapter 4). The extract analyzed can be considered a clear example of intertextuality. It can be observed, in fact, that the way "Turkish Americanness" makes sense within the text is strictly connected to other texts and discourses issued both by Armenians as well as Turks and Americans about each other and the events of the late 1910s.

What is particularly interesting for the purposes of this study — even more so than the general discourses regarding integration and estrangement circulating in literature about Turkish Americanness in general — are the ones dealing with individual Turkish American or

Turkish characters living in the US. These discourses, even if referring to specific individuals, through mimetic devices such as dialogues, descriptions and intersubjectivity, show possible ways of making meaning of the Turkish American experience and in this way contribute to challenging readers' possible previous stereotypes and establish new discourses about Turkish Americanness.

The case of Mustafa, in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), can be considered an example of the representation of Turkish Americans as highly assimilated subjects within the mainstream American culture. In this specific case, the device of ventriloquism as it was defined by Felski drawing on Bakhtin (see section 6.2.2) is particularly relevant. Literary texts, miming reality, contain multiple language varieties and, the use of specific linguistic resources as well as language choices — see also section 3.7.2 — indexes specific positionings within society. Mustafa, for instance, because of his ability — and will — to master a specific variety of American English is usually “taken as an American, presumably from the Midwest” by most of Armanoush's Armenian American friends (Shafak, 2007: 93). Throughout the novel, however, even more significantly Mustafa's self-identification as an American rather than a Turk emerges very clearly in the form of a linguistic preference, of an initial refusal to publicly perform the “part of the Turk” displaying his fluency in Turkish.

“What would you like to drink sir?” asked the stewardess in Turkish, half bent toward him. She had eyes of sapphire blue and wore a vest of exactly the same color, on the back of which were printed puffy, pastry clouds.

For a split second Mustafa hesitated, not because he didn't know which language to reply in. After so many years he felt much more comfortable expressing himself in English than in Turkish. And yet, it seemed equally unnatural, if not arrogant, to speak English to another Turk. Consequently Mustafa Kazancı had up till now solved this personal quandary by avoiding communicating with Turks in the United States. His aloofness toward his fellow countrymen and countrywomen became painfully blatant at ordinary encounters like this one, however. He glanced around, as if searching for an exit, and having failed to find one nearby, finally answered, in Turkish: “Tomato juice, please.” (Shafak, 2007: 289)

Mustafa's preference to use English can be regarded as certainly meaningful in relation to his integration within the American society. The fact that the character tried to avoid any situation where he would have been obliged to speak his mother tongue in the US, and therefore to identify and be identified as a Turk, clearly illustrates also his double desire of

both belonging within the American society and at the same time of taking a distance from Turkey. Mustafa's willingness to deny his origins and the events of his juvenile years is, in fact, at the very basis of his almost complete assimilation within the US culture and for him, the negation of his history is more crucial than the affirmation of his belonging in the US. In this regard, for instance, the language choices as well as the avoidance of words such as "home" and "home country" when the narration focalizes on Mustafa and his thoughts in regard to Turkey and his life in the US are meaningful. Living in America as "Mostafa", as his wife calls him, changing his name and changing his language, in fact, are for the character the most effective ways of escaping the person he once was and his sins, including the regret for having raped his sister.

After so many years of complete detachment, his familiarity with Turkish culture, like a parchment drawing stripped by the sun and the wind had been bit by bit rubbed out. Istanbul had imperceptibly become a ghost city for him, one that had no reality except to appear every now and then in dreams. Much as he used to fancy the city's main quarters and characters and culture, ever since he had settled in the United States he had gradually become numb toward Istanbul and almost everything associated with it.

Yet it was one thing to move away from the city where he was born, and another to be so far removed from his own flesh and blood. Mustafa Kazancı did not so much mind taking refuge in America forever as if he had no native soil to return to, or even living life always forward, with no memories to recall, but to turn into a foreigner with no ancestor, a man with no boyhood, troubled him. Through the years, there were times when he had been tempted, in his own way, to go back to see his family and face the person he had once been, but Mustafa had discovered that this was not easy and did not become any easier with age. Finding himself more and more distanced from his past, he had eventually cut all ties to it. It was better this way. Both for him and for the ones he had once badly hurt. America was his home now. Yet, if truth to be told, more than Arizona or any other place, it was the future that he had chosen to settle in and call his home — a home with its backdoor closed to the past. (Shafak, 2007: 285)

The conditions that brought Mustafa to integrate within the American society and to seek a new life far away from Turkey are quite exceptional. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, detachment and a general sense of unfamiliarity, often flowing into contempt, are portrayed as very common feelings toward Turkey among the Turkish American characters in the works studied. While in general, as we will see below with Nellie and Elif, the second generation seems to have developed no interest and no familiarity with Turkey and its culture, the

situation seems to be quite different for those characters that are depicted as having moved to the US at an adult age. The estrangement and the aloofness of the first generation seem to be the result both of the complex and fragmented social context of Turkey and of the numerous urban and political changes the country has undergone in the recent decades.

Particularly interesting, in this regard, is the family saga *Seven Houses* (2002). Amber and her daughter Nellie illustrate quite well the different detachments, characterizing the attitudes of the two generations toward Turkey. The story is narrated with temporal gaps and the reader is therefore not very knowledgeable regarding the lives of the two women in America; however, when they arrive in Istanbul, it is quite clear that neither of them is at all familiar with the city or with the people there. At the customs, Amber, after having been confiscated the breast prosthesis she was carrying from the US for her aunt, still recognizes after years the overall corruption and arrogance among the authorities that brought her into exile (Croutier, 2002: 198) but everything else in the meanwhile has completely changed to her eyes and the difference with the past is so overwhelming that she cannot even find her way back home (Croutier, 2002: 199). Istanbul, described from Amber's perspective, has the shape of a place with nothing left to offer. From the perspective of a first-generation Turkish American, the presence of poor and uneducated people has completely changed the outlook of the old city and no trace is left of the elegant upper-middle class buildings she knew from her childhood. However, not only does Istanbul seem to have turned into a decadent metropolis but Turks themselves, from Amber and Camilla's bourgeois secularist perspective, seem to have completely changed during the years as a consequence of the new wave of religious conservatism that the two characters connect to the latest increase of poverty in the country. This economic explanation to a cultural change is presented as a matter of fact. Nevertheless, this way of making sense of Turkey's religious revival can be seen as strongly elitist; it implies that wealthy and educated people cannot be "brainwashed" — the tone of the characters is clearly depreciative — by religious leaders and can, therefore, have a better perspective on society and the way it should work¹²⁵. The intersubjective extract¹²⁶ below, where the narration focalizes on Amber, illustrates how Istanbul and its peoples are seen through her eyes.

¹²⁵ In contrast, other Turks would claim that AKP has favored the economic development of the country and improved the religious freedom of Turkish citizens. Furthermore, they would probably observe that since the 1980s in the country there has also been a substantial increase in the number of middle and middle-high class Muslims with conservative lifestyles.

The street noise boomed like thunder out of a loudspeaker, the narrow street below deeply groaning. The neglected roads crumbled for lack of maintenance. Mountains of debris blocked the streets, shades of gray and brown tinting the landscape like an old daguerreotype. This, once *her*¹²⁷ city, now bewildered and detached.

A group of pedestrians was waiting for the light to change, standing by a gargantuan statue of Atatürk, with his index finger pointing ahead at a peasant woman cuddling a bouquet of wheat and a young soldier charging ahead with his bayonet.

A bevy of schoolgirls not much younger than Nellie, wearing head scarves, crossed the street. Atatürk stood in the background with the same intensity pointing his finger at them. "I wonder what he'd think of all this" Amber told Camilla, who stuck her head out another window." Girls wearing scarves. Women wearing long coats, their heads covered, moving about the streets like black bundles. It's an effort to remember they are human beings with minds and souls, and bodies. And all these bearded men wearing beanies. I can't believe this reversal".

"You've seen nothing yet. They are everywhere now" Camilla pined. "How it breaks my heart to see such young girls covering themselves. Even at the University. Atatürk would stir in his grave if he knew what this country has come to after all his efforts to elevate women. But what can we do? We're a poor country". (Croutier, 2002: 200. My emphasis)

While Amber, who as a teen grew up in a very western and "American" environment (Croutier, 2002: 207-9), seems to be barely able to identify as a Turk given the sudden changes the country has undergone after her move, on the other hand the case of her daughter Nellie is quite different. Nellie's estrangement from the country is in fact more similar to that of a foreigner visiting an exotic land than to that of an unsatisfied exile going back home after too many years. The reader does not know if she ever visited Turkey before, but it is quite clear throughout the novel that the young girl is not accustomed at all to the local daily life and culture. In different occasions Nellie is indeed shown as not having the necessary linguistic resources and discursive or cultural repertoires for interpreting the ordinary events taking place around her in Istanbul — such as people selling fruits and vegetables in the streets (Croutier, 2002: 212). Also, apart from some simple words learned from a travelers' guide, the girl seems also to be completely unable to communicate with the locals and with her family in their native language (Croutier, 2002: 273).

¹²⁶ I refer to an extract as "intersubjective" when it is possible to observe in the text intersubjectivity, that is to say, when the text offers its readers an insight into the feelings and ways of understanding and interpreting the world of the characters.

¹²⁷ The use of the possessive pronoun "her" signals internal focalization of the narration on Amber.

As regards the self-identification of Turkish American characters, a slightly different case is that of Elif, the protagonist and the implied author of the autobiographical novel *The Possessed* by Batuman (2010). The young woman seems to mainly identify herself as a Turk within American society (Batuman, 2010: 57), but at the same time throughout the novel she also repeatedly takes distance both from Turks in general and from other Turkish people living in the US in particular, referring in numerous occasions to what makes her different from them, including her native-like fluency in English (8 and 10), her having grown up in the US (57), and her inscribed (12 and 16-17) as well as ascribed Americanness (13-4 and 145). As we can see below from the discussion between Elif and a Turkish sergeant, apart from Turks living in Turkey the protagonist is never addressed as a Turkish woman by foreigners and no mention of her origins is ever made by other American characters either.

The sergeant asked about my studies. When I said that I studied literature, he asked whether I was reading the works of Yaşar Kemal (a famous Turkish novelist who wrote his first short stories during his military service in Kayseri). I was not reading the works of Yaşar Kemal.

“What author are you reading? What authors are you concentrating on?” He asked.

“I do not know yet,” I said. “Maybe Pushkin”.

“Pushkin? Who is that, an American?”

“Well more of a Russian, actually.”

This information clearly made no sense at all to the sergeant. He blinked once or twice and told me how lucky I was to study at such a famous American university, how many Turkish boys and girls — and not only boys and girls — would give their ears to have such an opportunity.

“An opportunity for what?” he demanded rhetorically, leaning toward me over the table.

“An opportunity for what?” I echoed.

“An opportunity for having their voices heard! For telling people the truth about Turkey, and not the nonsense propagated by the Europeans”. (Batuman, 2010: 87-88)

The term voice, here, has actually the same meaning as the one introduced in Section 3.7.2. Elif possesses all the linguistic as well as non-linguistic repertoires necessary for delivering a message effectively within American society, where the construction of Turkishness — as also McCarthy has pointed out — is based to a significant degree upon the discourses of the Europeans. The perspective of the sergeant, here, can be regarded as a postcolonial one; his words reflect the powerlessness of Turkey, its impossibility to actively contribute to the construction of its own identity in the West and Elif — as a Turkish scholar working in the US

— is in his eyes the ideal candidate for carrying out a critique of Western imperialism. Elif, nevertheless, from an academic perspective completely refuses to be identified as a Turk, as someone exclusively interested in giving Turks a voice. The apparent ambiguities characterizing Elif's identification are the outcome of her particular position in relation to different contexts. While Elif makes sense of her alienation within the mainstream American society by identifying herself as a Turk (Batuman, 2010: 57), she does not want to position herself as a Turk in a Turkish context and similarly she refuses to see herself as such within academia.

More in general, unlike other first-generation migrants, there is no kemalist patriotism or affection toward Turkey in the words of the protagonist but she seems to have developed just a very critical attitude toward everything she sees and knows of the country. Turkish tea, for instance, is described by Elif as "very strong, sugary Lipton" (Batuman, 2010: 9), a comment that can be regarded as an intertextual reference to the poor quality of the beverage being the brand a popular low priced industrial infusions available in American supermarkets. Similarly, then, the state of Turkish novels, including Orhan Pamuk's work, is depicted by Elif as simply depressing (Batuman, 2010: 89) and no better is the picture painted in the novel about the country itself, which is described to an English-speaking public as generally dodgy and dangerous (85). Elif's peculiar way of taking distance from what she perceives as mainstream Turkish identity, furthermore, is particularly evident observing how she portrays Turks as a general category. As the short extract below illustrates, she seems, in fact, to have a sort of downplaying attitude toward Turkish people through which, on one hand, she excludes herself from the group, winking an eye to the implied American readers and, on the other, reaffirms in a certain way her belonging to a somehow different yet not clearly defined category.

A distant uncle of mine had married an Uzbek beauty called Lola, who never talked to anyone or even opened her mouth (although she smiled often, showing beautiful dimples). Only two years after their marriage did it become generally known that Lola had three gold teeth. Everyone would always ask my uncle "How do you live with someone you do not communicate with?" And my uncle always shouted: "Uzbek Turkish is very close to our Turkish language!"

I hadn't believed my uncle, partly because he was crazy — hadn't he spent his later years in a gardening shed in New Jersey, writing a book about string theory and spiders — and partly because, in my experience, Turkish people thought that every language was close to

our Turkish language. Many times, I had been told that Hungarian was related to Turkish, that the Hungarians and Turks descended from the same Altaic peoples, that Attila the Hun was Turkish, and so on. When I went to Hungary, however, I discovered that Hungarians do not share these beliefs at all. "Of course we have some Turkish words in our language," they would say. "For example, handcuffs. But that's because *you* occupied our country for four hundred years". (Batuman, 2010: 93-4. My emphasis)

The way Elif portrays the overall attitude of Turkish people toward other languages is particularly meaningful. While in other parts of the novel she often gives scholarly explanations about the differences and similarities between different Turkic languages (for instance Batuman, 2010: 98, 145), Turks are rather described as holding a set of folk opinions that bring them to consider all the languages similar to Turkish, disregarding their grammar and the history of the peoples who speak them. Challenging this theory, the author — even though she is a Turk to the eyes of the Hungarians — implicitly positions herself also as someone who makes sense of languages in a way different from mainstream Turks. Her way of understanding herself as a non-Turk, therefore, in this respect is mainly related to her educational background.

A case apart that shares some features with the ones presented above, is the one of Ömer in *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004). The man, a PhD student living in the US since not so long ago, appears throughout the novel to experience a kind of an estrangement from his home country that bears certain similarities to the one of Amber. While Amber seems to have difficulties considering herself as having something in common with other non-Western and more religious Turks, Ömer, on his turn, seems to have difficulties being recognized by low-class Istanbulites as a Turk. Ömer, furthermore, unlike other characters such as Mustafa or Elif, for instance, does not seem to have developed any sense of belonging within the US either (Shafak, 2004: 108-10). Despite his admission of being more acquainted with the mainstream American culture than with "his own" (Shafak, 2004: 75) the student, in fact, as the intersubjective extract below illustrates, does not seem to feel completely at home in the new country and it is also particularly meaningful that he always refers to himself and is referred to by others mainly as a foreigner.

When you leave your homeland behind, they say, you have to renounce at least one part of you. If that was the case, Ömer knew exactly what he had left behind: his dots! Back in Turkey, he used to be ÖMER ÖZSİPAHİOĞLU.

Here in America, he had become an OMAR OZSIPAHIOGLU.

His dots were excluded for him to be better included [...]

As names adjust to a foreign country something is always lost — be it a dot, a letter, or an accent. What happens, to your name in another territory is similar to what happens to a voluminous pack of spinach when cooked — some new taste can be added, to the main ingredient but its size shrinks visibly. The primary requirement of accommodation in a strange land is the estrangement of the hitherto most familiar: your name.

Playing around with pronunciation, curbing letters, modifying sounds, looking for the best substitute, and if you happen to have more than one name, altogether abandoning the one less presentable to native speakers... Foreigners are people with either one or more parts of their names in the dark. Likewise, in his case, too, *Ömer* had replaced his name with the less arduous and more presentable *Omar* or *Omer*, depending' on the speaker's choice. (Shafak, 2004: 5-6. Emphasis original)

Ventriloquism, in this case, plays a fundamental role. Different language varieties and micro-phonetic changes in the name of the protagonist signal different identities, different ways of conceiving his experience and different contexts. *Ömer's* estrangement, however, as I mentioned above, is not a condition he exclusively experiences within the US, but, as it became apparent also from the extract I quoted in the previous section, on the contrary it seems to be quite a familiar situation for him. As an upper-middle class secular Turk, in fact, *Ömer* is described as used to being regarded as a foreigner by most of the “less western”, “less educated” and “less powerful Turks” (Shafak, 2004: 330). Interestingly, here, the narrator, about whom we only know that s/he lives, or used to live, in Istanbul, draws quite a colonial picture of Turkish society based on an understanding of the distance from “Westernness” and “Orientalness” in terms of power, economic and educational differences. This perspective, however, as I argued in Amber and Camilla's cases, is quite reductive, as it implies an equation between low-class citizens and more conservative Muslims that actually is not shared by all Turks but generally belongs to the secular elites (or possibly Western foreigners).

6.5.4 POSITIONING TURKISH AMERICAN IDENTITIES IN RELATION TO ISLAM

As was stated in Chapter 4, discourses about the positioning of Turkish Americanness in relation to the Muslim world are relevant and quite evident during this particular conjuncture. The need to take distance from the mainstream Western representation of Islam, the recent religious revival in Turkey under the AKP, and the international geo-political interests for the Middle East are all factors that no doubt today play a huge role in the making of Turkish American identities especially by power groups such as ATAA and TAIL. Quite

interestingly, however, similar discourses can be found not only among the webpages of heritage associations with economic and political interests, but also in literature. In fact, even though they do this to different degrees, all the novels I have included in this study position Turkish American characters in reference to Islam at least within, but eventually also outside, the Turkish context. Once again the general picture can be considered quite homogenous: Turkish Americans are usually depicted as individuals with no significant interest in lifestyle-regulating religious practices or religion in general. *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004), as we have seen above, certainly centrally positions Turkish Americanness in relation to Islam¹²⁸. More specifically, throughout the novel, the constant differentiation the narrator makes between Ömer and his pious Moroccan friend Abed can be considered particularly meaningful. Their different attitudes toward Islam, as illustrated by the extract below, are presented from the very first pages of the book as one of the main dividers between the two.

Only two customers are left at the bar. Two graduate students whose combined tuitions and rents far exceed their grants, both foreign in this city, both from Muslim countries. Despite the apparent similarity, and despite being close friends, they might not have that much in common, at least not at this particular moment, not by 2:36 a.m., when one of them is drunk as a skunk, the other as sober as always [...]. (Shafak, 2004: 3)

Why are you complaining all the time?" sniped Ömer in a croaky voice. "What is it to you anyhow? You never drink! Damn you, Abed! You didn't drink the day you learned your girlfriend was still waiting for you in Morocco. You didn't drink when I proposed to Gail in front of your eyes. If joy is not a good enough occasion for you, what about sorrow then? You didn't drink the day you learned your girlfriend was getting married to your cousin! If you do not drink at this age you'll end up swimming in alcohol when you get old."

"So that's what you have done tonight? Investing in a better future? [...] Let me see...in the past two years you left Istanbul and came to the States to get a PhD; you forgot about the PhD., and specialized instead in *girlfriends* but you failed in all of them; you killed your stomach and then your stomach almost killed you¹²⁹[...] "As to my nondrinking", Abed nasaled when his nose had finally let him continue. "You can be totally open and totally aggressive. That's what Gail does to us all the time, no? So if you think I'm outdated, boring

¹²⁸ It might be relevant to consider that *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004) was written a few years after 9/11 and this is also the first book that the author wrote in English, more precisely while living in the US. Therefore, it might be licit to presume, also in view of the heavy annotation that the narrators make about Turkey and Turkish culture, that the book was written, if not for an American audience, at least for an international one.

¹²⁹ During the novel the reader will discover that Ömer has almost been killed due to his habits of drinking too much alcohol and too much coffee.

asshole trying to secure a nice little pasture in heaven to wave down at you, just say it aloud [...](Shafak, 2004: 11-3. Emphasis original)

The initial focus of the narrating voice on the differences between Ömer and Abed sets the basis for a constant confrontation between the two characters and deep intersubjectivity in this case is a particularly relevant device for challenging readers' prejudices. Despite the similarities that the mainstream American and Western public might think the two men have, the students, on the wake of their first appearance, are depicted throughout the novel as significantly different from each other both in terms of their cultural and social backgrounds, as well as their overall attitude toward Islam. This is particularly significant if we consider that the narrating voice posing this difference is probably a secular middle-/upper-class Turk or a Western foreigner who lives or has lived in Istanbul. While Ömer, as it also appeared in the previous sections, is depicted as belonging to a wealthy secular Turkish family, Abed, on the other hand, is the only son of an extremely pious widow from the Moroccan working class and their peculiar situations, from the narrator's perspective, might be considered to have influenced to a certain extent their overall disposition toward religion. It is especially through a comparison of their habits and lifestyles — which, as explained in Chapter 3, are practices through which people perform their identities — that the differences between the two characters in relation to Islam emerge more clearly. While on the one hand Abed is described as someone who carries a moderately conservative lifestyle corresponding to his beliefs, not eating pork, for instance, and showing a certain disinterest toward girls, on the other hand, Ömer is constantly depicted as involved in practices such as drinking to the point of almost killing himself, constantly smoking marijuana, eating haram food, having a promiscuous sexual life, insulting religion and lying. While these activities probably prevent the young man from being regarded by Western readers as a Muslim — or at least as a practicing one — interestingly, in the eyes of his Moroccan friend Ömer still remains a believer, even though a lost one (Shafak, 2004: 14). Ömer's own dis-identification as a practicing Muslim who believes in Islam also becomes apparent when the narration, through the device of deep intersubjectivity, focalizes on the thoughts of the character on the very first pages (Shafak, 2004: 14). An agnostic "born Muslim" (Shafak, 2004: 14) with no interest in Islam or any other religion, Ömer, interestingly, however, at the same time also seems to partially identify with Islam probably as a consequence of his overall background (i.e. coming from a country with a Muslim majority) — an aspect that is also at the basis of Abed's perspective in this regard.

Also Mustafa in *The Bastard of Istanbul* is clearly depicted as a man who is not and has never been religious (Shafak, 2007: 294) but in his case no details are given regarding his general behaviors and lifestyle, nor the way he relates to Islam. Quite interestingly, during the narration it appears that Mustafa is an occasional visitor at El Tiradito, a Mexican shrine dedicated to a sinner. His sporadic presence at the sanctuary, however, is depicted more as something connected to the possibility of being welcomed for and despite his past faults rather than to a form of devotion (Shafak, 2007: 293-4).

Finally, as regards Islam, *The Possessed* (2010) can be considered as quite a peculiar case among the novels examined here. Islam and other usually connected issues such as the facts of 9/11, do occasionally appear on the pages of this autobiographical narration, but quite interestingly, as if denying any sort of connection between it and her identification as a Turk, the narrator never positions herself in relation to the Muslim world, if not indeed expresses a substantial indifference and disinterest toward the whole topic. And this, for instance, is what happens in the last pages of the book when, during a conversation with another scholar, Elif makes her lack of interest toward issues like Islamism particularly evident.

6.6 CONCLUSIONS

Who is Turkish American? This chapter, like the previous ones, aimed at presenting possibilities of meaning and ways of understanding and constructing Turkish Americanness that circulate in the public sphere but that are located in a field (i.e. literature) which is seldom investigated in multi-sited studies. Boelstorff, Nardi, et al. (2012), writing about ethnography and virtual worlds, claim that “there can be no argument for privileging certain locales or modes of study. Pertinent destinations and techniques issue from the aims of the research and the choices of fieldsite and method should be based on the questions motivating the inquiry” (6). This consideration, however, applies not only to virtual worlds, but also to literature.

Literature, on one hand, has the power of spreading in the public sphere discourses that are not necessarily related to the interests of particular groups but that with no doubt have an important role in the making of identities and identity repertoires. These discourses might intersect and concur with others in shaping the imagination of people and creating alternative identity repertoires. Literary artifacts, furthermore, engage us in seeing things in a different light and make us aware of alternative ways of thinking, of giving meaning to ourselves, to the

Others and ultimately, to the world. They present “potential truths” (Felski, 2008: 86) and it is in this respect, especially, that it can be claimed that the literary works analyzed concur to the making of Turkish Americanness. They reveal possible identities, possible ways of looking at the Turkish American experience that challenge previous discourses and essentialist positions. Apart from the autobiographical novel *The Possessed* by Batuman (2010), the works analyzed, in fact, present a plurality of independent voices and points of view that are not submerged by the one of the narrator but that rather coexist and interact with others within as well as outside the novel, revealing the complexity of the Turkish American experience. The concepts developed by Felski (2008) — i.e. linguistic still life, ventriloquism and deep intersubjectivity — combined to the ones discussed in Chapter 3 thus offer a very useful framework for investigating how literature construct identities.

As in my other case studies, here it was not my purpose to present an account of all that has been said about Turkish Americans in literary artifacts. Rather, I wanted to analyze different artifacts and show different perspectives, pointing again at the heterogeneity of the Turkish American situation. Interestingly it can be observed that despite some differences, in most of the cases the picture of Turkish Americanness in the novels analyzed presents many similarities. Ömer, Mustafa and Amber, for instance, have very similar migration trajectories: they all moved to the US for educational purposes, got married with an American and, especially as regards the latter two, they assimilated within American society. Furthermore, it should be noted that they also share a secular background and all these characteristics, going back to my other chapters, actually make them extremely similar to some of my informants and partly to ATAA’s (but partially also TAI’s) discourses about Turkish Americanness. Through literature, furthermore, it has been possible to observe also others’ perspective on Turkish Americanness, such as the one of the Armenian American characters in *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007). Unfortunately, however, those were minimal within the novels analyzed.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

I opened this book by claiming that Turkish American studies as a field is in desperate need of redefinition. To this end, I argued that we should reconsider the Turkish American experience in view of a dynamic and contextual approach to identities. Within the field, there have been very few attempts to discuss and question the notion of “Turkish Americanness” and now we have reached the point where I believe we should ask ourselves: What are Turkish American Studies? Which identities are referred to when talking about “Turkish Americans”? The fact is that most of the scholars working in this area have carried out research without really problematizing “Turkish American” as a label and their studies, as a result of a priori, static definitions, have failed to create awareness about the “emptiness” of this signifier. The issue is not minimal: who is Turkish American? Who exactly are we investigating? Only if we understand and affirm the positionality and the complexity of this definition will it be possible to seriously do Turkish American studies. This means that we should be aware of the different possibilities of meaning that Turkish Americanness implies and that, consequently, we should consider different contexts in defining them.

The ambition and challenge of this work was to present an ensemble of ways of making sense of Turkish Americanness; a collection of possible meanings that could serve as evidence of the complexity of the Turkish American experience by pointing at its diverse facets. Of course it was not my aim to present an all-inclusive catalogue of identities, a “summary” of everything that Turkish Americanness might include. In fact, conceiving identities as dynamic semiotic practices, this would not have even been possible. This study, rather, should be seen as an attempt to challenge normative definitions of Turkish Americanness by pointing at the impossibility of defining once and for all the object of Turkish American studies.

In this book we have observed that currently, in the public sphere alone, there is little agreement on what Turkish Americanness as an identity stands for. Secularist and gülenist groups, as a consequence of their diverse positions in respect to a number of topics, have built and shared very different discourses about Turkish Americanness. Overall, certainly some

similarities can also be noticed in the way secular and gülençi organizations make sense of the Turkish American experience. They both share, for instance, a certain attention to presenting Turkish Americans as middle-/upper-class individuals well integrated in the American society, and they both aim at establishing a sort of Turkic/Turkish American identity based on language, cultural or religious similarities rather than citizenship. How Turkish American identities are defined is a matter of how a social actor is positioned in time, society or societies and in relation to a number of discourses that, for different reasons, are relevant in each context. On the one hand, as I mentioned above, secular and gülenist organizations have very different positions, while on the other hand they also share a similar discursive background within the American context as their constructions of Turkish Americanness have a common basis in the history of Turkish migration to the US and the stereotypes that circulate in the US about Turks, Muslims and migrants in general.

After having explored how Turkish American identities have been constructed in the public sphere by powerful organizations within the Turkish American context, looking at the way some of the members and sympathizers of a secularist association connected to ATAA make sense of themselves as Turkish Americans (or not), allowed me to further problematize the Turkish American experience. My aim was to show how different characteristics, life trajectories, and domains of life can affect and produce variety in the way identities and belonging are conceived by individuals. Interestingly, it appeared, for instance, that most of my first-generation informants, even though they happen to be also the most active ones within the organization, make a strict distinction between themselves and second-generation individuals based on their linguistic as well as non-linguistic resources, or the lack thereof. Within ATAA official discourse, however, even though the association acknowledges diversity, there is no trace of this distinction. It should also be noted that even though secularism for those among my informants who grew up in Turkey between the 1980s and the 2000s — so during the Turkish religious revival — is an important identity marker, in the other cases that was not considered as particularly meaningful.

In the final phase of this study, I brought my research to yet a different site as I engaged in literary analysis. I was interested in showing how identities can be constructed in the public sphere also through literary discourses. Novels, as multi-voiced artifacts, offer a different perspective on Turkish Americanness and they can contribute to the sharing of certain images of Turkish Americanness in society. It was interesting to see how the social positioning of Turkish Americans in all the novels studied — also from an Armenian American perspective

— substantially correspond to the overall picture constructed by ATAA as well as by TAI and observed, in part, also during my interviews. Also here Turkish Americans, in fact, mainly appear as middle-/upper-class, highly educated — with the exception of Nellie — individuals who have been successful in adapting or have been assimilated within the American culture. It is interesting, furthermore, how the families of the Turkish American characters have been depicted, even if in different ways, as secularist. From a sociological perspective it could be argued that the types of Turkish Americans in the novels are a reflection (conscious or unconscious) of the authors' positions within society (see for instance Appadurai, 1996; Said, 1993). The novels discussed here, consequently, could be considered as contextually framed responses to certain societal developments. This way of approaching literature, however, from a literary perspective appears problematic for at least two main of reasons, the first of which being that literary artifacts are regarded here as products rather than as processes and, secondly, the importance that readers have in the construction of meaning is completely disregarded (see Attridge, 2004; Nussbaum, 1995). This approach to literature also implies a sort of social determinism whose effects and implications seem to be dangerously similar to the ones of culturalism.

From an overall methodological perspective, my analysis was inspired, in part, by CDA and to a major extent by the work of Blommaert (2005; 2006; Blommaert and Dong, 2010; and Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). In certain cases I found myself struggling with finding the best way to define my work; this underlines the fact that my explicit aim was to do interdisciplinary research. Apart from issues of definition, that — as I explained in Chapter 3 — also in this case are strictly positional, critical approaches to the interpretation of discourse are explicitly driven by ethical and political principles. One of their basic tenets is to focus on social issues, highlighting inequalities and abuses and I certainly did encounter inequalities, and pointed at identity discourses legitimizing the power and the interests of specific groups. It can also be argued that unveiling, making things explicit, is already a way of taking a sociopolitical stance (see for instance Wodak, and Meyer, 2001). I believe, however, that the most important critical aspect of this study has mainly to do with how this work fits within the field of Turkish American studies. As Pennycook claims, pointing at the presence of diversity can be considered a form of resistance in itself (2012: 29). Showing what diverges from the norm(s) is in itself a challenge to the norm, and to the way of giving meaning to the world of the ones who impose their own understanding of the world on others. The same, however, can also be applied to identities. Presenting different and sometimes contrasting

ways of giving meaning to Turkish Americanness and making explicit the multiplicity of discourses that today compete for and participate to the making of Turkish Americanness — from the ones created and shared by associations such as ATAA and TAIL to the ones of their members and to literature — can in itself be considered a challenge to its hegemonic definition(s) and, ultimately, to the essentialism that still is dominant within this area of research.

As I explained in the Introduction, discourse analysis also in its critical forms is often employed for investigating identities. If we look at identities as semiotic practices through which we give meaning to ourselves, the world and the Others, it is a logical consequence that their investigation necessarily requires the use of concepts and approaches usually employed to analyze discourses in general, or, paraphrasing Hall (1997a), the ways in which language creates knowledge. The choice of approaching Turkish Americanness from a discourse analytical perspective, therefore, was made on the basis of methodological and theoretical considerations about its usefulness for the purposes of this work. As I explained in Chapter 3, discourse analysis provides a set of very useful concepts and guidelines for investigating discourses and identities. Considering that “all practices have a discursive aspect” (Hall, 1997a: 32), I decided to adopt a multimodal perspective toward discourse which allowed me to interpret diverse resources and to trace a general but also at the same time a more precise picture of how Turkish American identities are built by different social actors within different contexts.

As I explained in Chapter 1 and 3, this study takes a multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of discourse that is guided by CDA, ethnography and multimodal analysis. In view of the data at my disposal, therefore, I decided to focus on ethnographic details such as contexts and the relation between communication acts and contexts, rather than careful linguistic description (e.g. syntactical constructions, coherence, phonetic details). Similarly, as regards the work of contextualization, I mainly, but not solely, stressed the importance of macro-contexts (i.e. predictable and stable contexts such as the historical and cultural situation of Turkey and of the US) and this is especially true for Chapter 4 and 6 where micro-contexts (i.e. changeable and unpredictable contexts that define the situation, such as a certain advertisement popping up on my screen while working or a member of ATAA posting a certain status update on Facebook) seemed less relevant. It is also true that especially in Chapter 5, however, micro-

contexts (for instance where and when a certain conversation or episode took place) played an important role in shaping my understanding of the data.

The choice of adopting an interdisciplinary approach, combining the analysis of literature, websites and ethnographic data, gave me the possibility to explore very different sites where Turkish Americanness is constructed. Through the use of literature I could also point at discourses about identities the importance of which in shaping people's imagination and understanding is often forgotten. While some researchers, as I pointed out in Chapter 6, certainly have already used literature for the purpose of understanding societal discourses and showed its usefulness for doing so (Felski, 2008; Nussbaum, 1995), literary artifacts, nevertheless, are seldom combined with other types of data. On the basis of what we could see in this study, it can be argued that literature is no different from other cultural artifacts and resources in providing insights into discourses circulating within society(ies) and in influencing the way through which people understand reality. Denying literature its social role means denying the importance of discourses that are part of the resources people make use of on a daily basis to make sense of their lives. In this respect I see no difference between ATAA's website, my informants' discourses or Shafak's novels; at different levels they all contribute to creating possible understandings of and perspectives on identity, which I hope to have shown in this work.

Methodologically, the study of literary works did require a different act of positioning regarding the possibility of keeping an insider's perspective in the analysis. The analyst (anthropologist, ethnographer) usually aims at interpreting semiotic acts for what they mean to the people who *produce* them; applying this approach to the analysis of literature, however, is not relevant in the same way as its meaning is related to the way it is experienced and interpreted by consumers rather than solely to the intention of the author and his/her position in society(ies). Understandably, therefore, especially in this particular case, the researcher needs to define her/his position of analysis in advance and reflexivity becomes a fundamental requirement. As a Turkologist for instance, I recognized that I pointed to many details that probably are particularly significant especially to Turks, Turkish Americans or to people sharing with me a similar interpretative space. Nevertheless, I always tried to explain the reasons behind my interpretations, pointing at the specific reading-contexts within which they may — or may not — be shared.

It was my ambition to challenge normative definitions of Turkish Americanness and to show diverse possibilities of meaning. A lot of work, nevertheless, is still to be done in the field of identity studies within the Turkish American context. Analyzing in more detail how the Gülen group makes sense of Turkish and of Turkic American identities, for instance, would not only be interesting but also seems necessary, considering the growing importance of the movement. Furthermore, we have almost no information regarding the way Turkish Americanness is constructed by “Others”, for instance within American Armenian, American, Turkish and Turkic contexts. I have little to add in this respect; further research is necessary from that perspective, too. I believe, however, that the real challenge that Turkish American studies — and especially identity studies within this field — should face has to do with the dynamic and floating aspect of their object. In this study I have provided a discussion on some of the ways through which Turkish Americanness is given meaning to and, as I have already mentioned, there is still room for further investigations. Not only, however, would it be recommendable to analyze other discourses that might present a very different picture of Turkish Americans, but — considering the dynamic aspect of identities — it is actually necessary to constantly re-discuss the concept of Turkish Americanness and thus, the very object of Turkish American studies. This study is hopefully a step into that direction, and a contribution to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of what Turkish Americanness is in today’s complicated world.

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APPENDIX 1

ATAA's New Banner:



"ATAA Assembly of Turkish American Associations". Jul 2013 Web 11 Jul 2013

StarTURK Profiles:

Example 1:

ESIN ATIL

"Esin Atil received her first B.A. in literature and drama, and her second B.A. in applied arts and art history. She attended the graduate program of the University of Michigan, where she received her M.A. in European art and PhD. in Islamic art. In 1969, Dr. Atil joined the Smithsonian Institution as the Curator of Islamic Art at the Freer Gallery of Art, a post which she held for fifteen years. She later served as Historian of Islamic Art at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, two Smithsonian museums devoted to Asian art. After her retirement in 1993, she was appointed Research Associate.

Dr. Atil has organized numerous exhibitions and published close to twenty books on the artistic traditions of the Islamic world, the subjects of which range from studies on manuscripts, ceramics, and metalwork to surveys of Mamluk and Ottoman art. In addition, she has written about one hundred articles and a number of chapters in surveys. The first exhibitions she organized and wrote catalogues for were: 2500 Years of Persian Art (1971), Turkish Art of the Ottoman Period (1973) Ceramics from the World of Islam (1974), and Art of the Arab World (1975). Her subsequent major exhibitions and related publications included Brush of the Masters: Drawings from Iran and India (1978); Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks and Kalila wa Dimna: Fables from a Fourteenth-Century Arabic Manuscript (both 1981); and Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art (1986).

She co-authored Oriental Ceramics the World's Greatest Collections: Freer Gallery of Art (1975, reprinted 1981); edited Turkish Art (1980), writing the chapter entitled "The Art of the Book;" and wrote the section on "Islamic Pottery," in Ceramic Art of the World of Islam (1985). Between 1985 and 1987, Dr. Atil was Guest Curator at the National Gallery of Art, where she published

the Suleymanname: The Illustrated History of Suleiman the Magnificent (1986); as well as The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1987), to accompany the traveling exhibition of the same title, which she organized. In 1987 she received the Grand Award for Culture and Art from the President of Turkey and the Medal of Honor from the Assembly of Turkish American Associations for her work on this exhibition. The same year she was awarded honorary doctorates from the Bogazici and Karadeniz Universities in Turkey.

Dr. Atil served as Guest Curator of the exhibition Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait, which was shown in the United States in 1990-92, then toured Europe; she was also the editor of the volume with the same title, which was translated into French, Italian, German, Portuguese, and Arabic. Her other publications include Images of Imperial Istanbul, a facsimile of a sixteenth-century work with panoramic views (1993), and Levni and the Surname: The Story of An Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festival (1999), another facsimile published in English and translated into Turkish. She is also the author of the chapters on: "The Ottoman World in the Nineteenth-Century" in Voyages & Visions, "The Arts of Islam" in the Muslim Almanac (both 1995), "Islamic Metalwork" in Culture and Learning in Islam (2003), and "a Calligrapher and His Work" in Mohamed Zakariya: Islamic Calligrapher (2006).

Dr. Atil contributes regularly to scholarly journals, and serves on the advisory boards of scholarship and museum programs, as well as on the editorial boards for several periodicals. In addition, she has worked on films on various aspects of Islamic art, most of which have been distributed internationally. Since her retirement, she has undertaken consulting work on museum management, educational curricula, and exhibition planning in the Islamic countries and elsewhere-, and continues to lecture and write articles and books.

Dr. Atil has traveled extensively, conducting research, participating in conferences, and presenting lectures in the United States, Europe, and the Islamic world. She has visited and researched in northern and eastern Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania), western and south-eastern Asia (Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, and Malaysia), and throughout Turkey" ("StarTurk", ATAA, 12 Mar 2013 Web 11 Jul 2013)

Example 2:

DR. ALI ŞÜKRÜ KIRAN

Dr. Kiran was born in Istanbul in 1949. After finishing the Vefa High School, he graduated from the Mechanical Engineering department of Istanbul Technical University in 1971. Upon completion of his doctorate in Industrial Engineering, he started working as a faculty member at the same university.

At 1980, he came to the USA and continued teaching at the Texas Tech University and the University of Southern California as a professor. In 1990, upon an invitation from the Dai-Yeh Institute of Technology, the foremost academic institution in Taiwan, he served as the Founding Chairman at the Industrial Engineering department. During his academic tenure, Dr. Kiran had published hundreds of articles in various academic journals.

In 1990, he founded the consulting firm, Kiran Consulting Group, in San Diego, and helped some of the world's best companies including Disney, IBM, Hewlett Packard and Dell.

In 2001, he founded a second company, Exametric Inc. The software that was developed by Exametric was used by the world's leading banks, such as Bank of America, Wells Fargo Bank and HSBC. During his tenure as the CEO of the company, he received the coveted Ernst & Young "Entrepreneur of the Year" award in San Diego for his leadership. Exametric merged with one of the world's leading software companies in 2006.

Dr Kiran is currently serving as the Chairman of the Board of Kiran Analytics, the software company that he founded in 2008.

As an active member of the Turkish Community in the USA, Dr. Kiran had been acting as the president of House of Turkey in San Diego.

Dr. Kiran lives with his wife and three children in his La Jolla, California home" ("StarTurk", ATAA, 24 Oct 2012 Web 11 Jul 2013

Example 3:

BURAK BILGILI

Operatic bass-baritone Burak Bilgili has a busy international career from the time of his professional operatic debut at the Teatro alla Scala in 2002 as Don Alfonso in *Lucrezia Borgia*.

Mr. Bilgili's 2010-2011 season engagements included his Bayerische Staatsoper debut as Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, role debuts as Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* in Avignon, and Hunding in *Die Walküre* with the Colorado Symphony, his return to the Grand Théâtre de Genève and the Seattle Opera as Don Basilio, and his return to Vancouver Opera as Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Concert engagements included his return to Carnegie Hall for Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* with the New York Choral Society, and Janacek's *Glagolitic Mass* with the Atlanta Symphony.

Future engagements include his debut with Washington National Opera as Zaccaria in *Nabucco* with American Symphony Orchestra Franz Schmit Notre Dame de Paris in Carnegie Hall, Savonlinna Opera - principle role in world premiere of *La Fenice* by Kimmo Hakola, Auckland Symphony - Zaccaria/*Nabucco*, Edmonton Opera - *Aida*-Ramfis, his debut with the Dallas Opera as Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, The Minnesota Opera as Zaccaria in *Nabucco*, Caramoor Festival as Procida in *I Vespri Siciliani* and with Cincinnati Opera in *Romeo et Juliette* as Friar Lawrence.

Investigating Contemporary Discourses on Turkish Americanness

He opened the 2009-2010 season with his San Francisco Opera debut as Ferrando in *Il Trovatore*, returned to the Grand Théâtre de Genève as Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, the Michigan Opera Theatre as Zaccaria in *Nabucco* and Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, and made his L'Opéra de Montréal debut as Fiesco in *Simon Boccanegra*. He finished the season in Cagliari as Giorgio in *I Puritani*.

In the 2008-2009 season, he returned to the Metropolitan Opera as Ferrando in *Il Trovatore* and made his Grand Théâtre de Genève debut in the same role. He returned to Florida Grand Opera as Nilkanatha in *Lakme*, the Michigan Opera Theatre as Dulcamara in *L'Elisir d'amore* and Palermo for *I Puritani*. He opened the 2007-2008 season as the Four Villains in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* for the Virginia Opera, followed by his debut at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino with Zubin Mehta as Padre Guardiano in *La forza del destino*, Don Basilio with Michigan Opera Theater and the Canadian Opera Company, Nourabad in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* for Florida Grand Opera, and completed the season in Daniel Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas*.

Mr. Bilgili's 2006-2007 season began at Den Norske Oper as Escamillo in *Carmen*, followed by Banquo in Verdi's *Macbeth* with the Vancouver Opera, and Walter in *Luisa Miller* with the Canadian Opera Company. With the Florida Concert Association he was heard as Ferrando in an all-star cast of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, followed by Colline in *La Bohème* at the Las Palmas Opera Festival. He closed the season as Ramfis in *Aida* at Cincinnati Opera. Mr. Bilgili opened the 2005-2006 season with Banco in *Macbeth* for the Canadian Opera Company, followed by Timur in *Turandot* for the New York City Opera, Leporello for Vancouver Opera, and Banquo for his Seattle Opera debut. Other engagements included Escamillo in *Carmen* at the Savonlinna Opera Festival, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with the Louisville Symphony Orchestra.

Highlights of Mr. Bilgili's 2004-2005 season included two debuts: his Canadian Opera Company debut in Toronto Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, followed by his debut at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona as Timur in *Turandot*. He was also Colline in *La Bohème* and Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Cincinnati Opera Festival. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Leporello in a new production of *Don Giovanni* in the 2003-2004 Season, under the baton of Sir Andrew Davis. His schedule in 2003-2004 also included house debuts with Pittsburgh Opera and Vancouver Opera as Don Basilio in *I Barbiere di Siviglia*.

In 2002 he debuted as Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Rome Opera and Palm Beach Opera and Sparafucile in Baltimore Opera's *Rigoletto*. Other highlights of previous seasons include Faure's *Requiem* in France with the Lyon Symphony Orchestra and Istanbul European Choir and solo recitals at the 25th and 28th International Istanbul Music Festival as part of the Young Soloist Series. Mr. Bilgili appeared in recital singing Schubert's *Die Winterreise* at the Austrian Consulate Cultural Office in Istanbul. He was a member of San Francisco Opera's Merola Program. Mr. Bilgili also appeared as soloist in Mozart's *Requiem* and Coronation Mass with the Istanbul European Choir, and joined the Istanbul State Opera as Don Geronio in *Il Turco in Italia* and Abimelech in *Samson et Dalila*.

Investigating Contemporary Discourses on Turkish Americanness

A recipient of numerous awards, the Turkish bass garnered First Prizes in the International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition 2002 in Vienna, the International Alfredo Kraus Competition 2002 in Las Palmas, the Neue Stimmen International Opera Competition in 2001, the Mario Lanza Opera Competition, and the J. Parkinson Italian Opera Competition. He was also a winner of the Loren Zachary Opera Competition, the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation International Voice Competition, and was First Place winner in both the Giargiari Bel Canto Voice Competition and 1998 Siemens Opera Competition in Turkey.

A graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, Mr. Bilgili's repertoire there included the title role in Don Giovanni, Count Rodolfo in La Sonnambula and Colline in La Bohème. Mr. Bilgili also graduated from Conservatory of Mimar Sinan University in 2000. He studied with Maestro Bonaldo Giaiotti and Katia Ricciarelli at the Academia Lirica Internazionale in Parma, Italy. He is recently working with Maestro Bill Schumann" ("StarTurk", ATAA, 26 Mar 2012 Web 7 Jul 2013).

TAII's new banner slides:

Example 1:



"Preparing Meal Bags for Parents of Hospitalized Children". *TAII*. n.a. Web 7 Jul 2013.

Example 2:



"Bake and Yard Sale to help victim of Hurricane Sandy". *TAII*. n.a. Web 7 Jul 2013.

Example 3:



“Istanbul Cultural Center. Dostluk Gecesi (tr. Friendship Evening)”. *TAII*. n.a. Web 7 Jul 2013.

Example 4:



“Cooking Class”. *TAII*. n.a. Web 7 Jul 2013.

APPENDIX 2

Below, transcripts of the interviews conducted for this book are presented.

ATAA'S FORMER PRESIDENT:

Extract 1:

Former President: ... I can categorize three groups(,) of Turkish Americans(,) in the FIFTIES (1.0) there is the(,) engineers and scientists (,) positions in the United States (,) imported from Turkey (1.0) whereas Germany imported WORKERS (1.0) united states imported (,) scientists and professors and teachers and mmm and engineers and physicians (,) mmm these people (,) are today (,) retired (,) most living in florida (,) in the winter months (,) and in turkey on the Aegean coast (,) in the Summer months (,). they are the children of the turkish republic (,) the first generation after the creation of the turkish republic (,) they are astonishingly (1.0) pro-secular-democracy mmm a#nd *unclear*pro-education (,) mmm they can be PURIST ELITE (1.0) they mo#st (,) the vast majority were never from the elite of Turkey (,) meaning wealthy(1.0) they were mainly like my parents (,) who won scholarships (,) to study at the university of Michigan mmm a#nd mmm started their lives here and continued their lives here (,) mmm (1.0) they come from the common flux of Anatolia mmm (1.5) the SECOND group are those who came pretty much in the eighties (1.0) and the nineties (,) and they are unskilled labors small businesses (1.0) among them there is a CONSERVATIVE grou#p that is secular in the lifestyle (,) meaning (,) they're conservative in the way they practice (,) their religion within their personal lives and their homes.and they would go to mosque on Friday (,) sometimes (,) they would celebrate thou religious holidays (2.0) but they would be mmm be very pro-secular (,) just like (,) my parents(,) ok (,) the so called elite group (1.5) in the THIRD group (,) is conservative (,) in their lifestyle(,) but much less favorable for secular order (2.0) a#nd they are growing in NUMbers a#nd i#n STRENGHT (,) NOW all these groups are represented by their own individual umbrella organizations(,) the first group pretty much is ataa(,) the group that I was the president of (,) the second is pretty much the turkish american mmm community centers (1.0) mmm such as the one in mmm in maryland (,) southern maryland (,) they usually have a mosque(,) they usually(,) celebrate a#ll the national as well as the religious holidays (,) and then the third group is (,) the fetullah gülen

mmm movement (,) followers(,) and their group is called turkic american alliance (,) taa mmm so this is the three groups mmm but similar to ataa (,) in new york there is another umbrella organization called ftaa (,) [federation of turkish american associations] (,) so ftaa and ataa work together a lot and (,) under our principle of (,) mmm creating building solidarity within THIS diversity(,) we're reaching out to both these Turkish American community centers (,) as well as the gülenists ...¹³⁰

1/17/2012. Washington DC: office meeting room

ADNAN:

Extract 2:

Adnan: I might have a better future in Turkey(1.5) a(#)and I(,) I mean like also [*unclear*] but(1.0) when you say(,)when you live a long term(1.0) things like the mentality is different than(1.0) everything in Turklike(,) you cannot get along with people(#) (1.0)everything is different

I (Alice): yah

A: in here like (,) you know(,) I'm my boss(,) my o boss you know like(,) I can do anything

I: yeah

A: and also it might be very difficult for my business too(,) because I've been in this business for like eight years(2.0) so(#) it's not smart thing to go back (,)Turkey and leave everything here

I: [yes]

A: mmm So(#) mmm some more [money](,)It's not the moment(,) make some money*laughter*

I: *laughter*

A: and then(,) I can go back maybe

I: yeah and you said that(,) the mentality is very different

¹³⁰ Transcription Conventions:

(,) for indicating pauses less than one second
 mmm for indicating vocalized pauses up to 1.5 second
 (1.0) for indicating longer pauses, up to 0.5 seconds precise
 CAPS for indicating louder or more stressed words and sounds
 [..] for indicating lower words or sounds
 ... for indicating interrupted quotations
 word for indicating laughter or other actions
 (#) for indicating sound lengthening
 / for indicating an external interruption of speech
 = for indicating overlapping sounds or words

Investigating Contemporary Discourses on Turkish Americanness

A: Yeah(#) because I mean (1.0)even like(.) for example even like(2.0) I do not know like(.) if you get a job in Turkey(.) your coworkers(.) it's different ...

...For example(.) when you work(.) you never(.) get whatever you work [you know](.) [I mean] *unclear*(.) in here(.) even if you work as a pizza delivery guy(.) you can make to 2000 dollars a month(.) in turkey the kids are doing that(.) by just drive the bicycles or motorcycles(1.0) [and you know] (.) in here(.) th(.)they do not make a [*unclear*](.) whatever you work(.) is normal...

in my country(.) not(.) [and I do not like](.) I'm NOT saying that I'm gonna do but just some examples(.) WHEN I WAS STUDENT HERE I did delivery pizza(.)[some like this](.) WHEN I WAS STUDENT HERE because it was my money and(.) my father was paying my school everything(1.0) and then I wa(#)s(1.0) I was paying my own expenses you know

I: yes(.) of course yes I understand and(.) yah//

A: and respect(.)people does not respect much (1.5)[even](.)it depends(.) but (1.5) [yes]

I: so would you say that in some ways you prefer to live here?

A: We(#)ll(.)for no(#)w(.).Turkey is a very big country(.) I love it(.)and it's very good...

like when you go summer like it(.)or for vacation(.) not the summer you know

I: yes

A: just work here(.) make money(.) like Germans...

1/15/2012. Washington DC: Condo's empty Library

Extract 3:

A: Everything is here(.) like my friends are here(#) (.)

I: [yeah]

A: I ha(#)ve(.) my dog is here(#) (.) my parrot

I: *soft laughter*

A: my friends(.) my car(1.0) in turkey like when I go there I just go there for vacation

I: yeah

A: but when I go turkey I use my father's car (.) but when I'm here I use my own car(.)I'm just making examples(.) you know

I: yes yes

A: I will laugh you(.)I make money from here...

1/15/2012. Washington DC: Condo's empty Library

Extract 4

A: [...]They are not like your(.) [good friends] like even back home[you know](.) *unclear*(.) for long time they stayed here and they have changed o(#)r (1.0)*sigh* the family they send trouble kids I guess

I: *laughter*

A: for *unclear* a long time they are Americanized(.) they ['ve being] selfish(1.0)you know Americans are selfish isn't it= **I:** yes

A: they(.) they(.) I still have cousins here(1.0) they(.) they went back to Turkey(1.0) I stopped taking them like(.) four five years because they are Americanized(.) you know like

I: Can(.) can you make me some example or(#)

A: For example I(.)I broke up(.) with my *embarrassed laughter* girlfriend(.)I was kind of I called them and they are saying "oh(.) you're sad"(.) they said [*unclear*](.) I asked him money like(.) [because I was a student] and I needed some(.) some like(.) fucking money(.)

I: [yeah]

A: and my father helped(.) helped ththeir family to get married you know

I: yes

A: so(.) and he said "no hum" and(.) and I told them Ali(.) "I mean is(.) is a minimum"(.) and he said no for a couple of hundred dollars(1.0)so I was like wow(1.0) ok

I: yeah

1/15/2012. Washington DC: Condo's empty Library

ESRA:

Extract 5:

Esra: So mmm yeha I came here to do my masters' degree and then when I GRADUATED(.) this was 98/99 mmm the American economy at the time was doing rea(#)lly well during the high-tech boom so(#) (.) and I wasn't ready to go back I mean I was enjoying myself(.) I really liked my life here and I just wanted to stay more mmm so I wanted to work here for a little bit and I got a job(.) because when you graduate from an American university you get a mmm one year work authorization

I: ok

E: and I wanted to use that mmm a(#)nd(,) I started working(,) for a(,)(#)first an(,) an organization called Turkish Place(#) and then with an American organization mmm so it kind of that extended you know(,) this company got a visa for me(,)(#)one more year one more year mmm and then (,) in about two years or so I got a job(,) a consulting job at anther American organization(,) and I thought well I cannot miss this opportunity(,) let me get this experience and then go back to Turkey(,) then I *laughter* joined the organization and I was in between I mean(,) from 96 to 2011(,)fifteen(,) sixteen years.

1/19/2012. Washington DC: office canteen

Extract 6:

E: ...So(#) I mean I grow up in the sma(#)ller safe secure town mmm and I always WANTED to come to the(,) US but mmm I never thought I would end up living here honestly(,) because I mea(,)(#)n. I didn't even(1.0) listen to(,)(#) (,) American(,) you know like some people are really into the American culture(,) I WASN'T like that I would listen to Turkish mu(,)(#)sic I watched Turkish mo(,)(#)vies I was(,)I was like(,)very Turkish to the(,) core mmm of my bones I mean *laughter* so(#) mmm I mean never though mmm I would end up staying HERE(,) but mmm I(,) I ended up staying here and I(,) I quite feel mmm If(,).if I say I don't have a GREEN CARD I still or(,) or the citizenship but I feel like a Turkish American now

I: yah yah

E: mmm more than just you know(,)one or the other(,)and I THI(,)(#)NK (1.5)maybe one of the REASONS why I was able to survive here(,) for a long time and feel like at HOME is because I'm so(,)(#) (1.0) Turkish that I was able to create my environment(,) here mmm and build around it so I never felt like I was mmm you know I always had turkish friends, I had(,) turkish food(,) my turkish music(,) my parties my associations my clubs so I mean mmm it wasn't for me mmm like I felt so lonely(,)(#) or I missed my culture(,)I was always able to live my culture

1/19/2012. Washington DC: office canteen

Extract 7:

E: For instance you see in those groups more people who come from (,) smaller cities(,) or even from big cities they are from more religious backgrounds

I: yah

E: mmm most of their(#) mmm women cover their heads(,) although not all might cover I mean they have some who(,) do not cover but most of them do(1.0) and you do not really see women that much(1.0) out(,) if you see mmm a woman like a speake(#)r something at one of their eve(#)nts(,) usually it's an American woman(,) you do not see a Turkish woman mmm doing all those embassy jobs(,) so(#) it's mmm I mean it's a different way of structure and they have mmm faith people(,)they have professional staff mmm I do not think they get paid FINE because they kind of operate in a MISSIONARY(,) mentality(,) but you see also very few women also working for this organizations(,) if they do work again(,) they are more in the supporting roles like they volunteer to make the(,) the food

I: ok

E: catering for the events and stuffs like that mmm whereas I mean(,) if you come to our board it's 80% *laughter* women *laughter*=**I:** yes I understood that *laughter*

E: so(#) mmm that's the main concern(,) and I THINK(1.0) unfortunately mmm this is a big divide between our(,) our groups like in(,)Turkey.

1/19/2012. Washington DC: office canteen

ELIF:

Extract 8

Elif: ... Mmm the first time I came to America was in 2004(1.0) I think (,)yes it was (,) I came here for vacation and I loved America(,) [you know(,) of course America is great (,)it's the new world*laughter*]mmm then I came here f(#)or a work and travel STUDY(,) and I experience Miami(,) you know(,) I worked at a(,) place called Gig's Music Palace WHICH is a great experience(,) but then I came here as a student(,) a(#)nd the problem was(,)you know because I LOved this country so much and I was very eager(,) very excited(,)but the thing is (1.0) once you really get into it(,) you know you can understand that mmm people can have some mmm people can really bites sometimes [like] "Where you came from"(,)you know it's very sad because (,) even like when I was studying (1.0) for my Masters 'degree we were

having you know group like activities(.) people just assumed that you just don't know and do not have the education...

1/20/2012: Washington DC: office

Extract 9

E:...I know that(1.0) families are having really hard time(1.0) with their kids(.) because kids are just like (,)not talking in turkish at all(1.0) they are just refusing it(.) because they feel like turkish culture is not really mmm (1.5) is not better than American culture(.)they do not understand(.) you know the(#) history(.) they do not understand(.) traditions(.) they feel like they are old fashioned(.) [you know] turkish music is boring or mmm I do not know folk dances are not(.) great(.) you know

I: *laughter*

E: but they like(.) you know the (,)hip hop kind of

I: yeah

E: culture(.) so *laughter*(2.0)WHICH I cannot blame anyone(1.0)it is very tough here and (,) I do not know what I am gonna do if I'm having a kid with my husband (1.5) I want him(.) or her(.) to really mmm acknowledge his Turkish (,) SIDE of it(.) but I know that it's gonna be(.) you know of course always mmm be more impressed by the American culture(.) [like everyone] he wants to go to the American(.) side of it(.)so it's our job to make sure our kids are not(.) just being *laughter*one sided, you know with a one sided culture but both(2.0)[so it's a little tough].

1/20/2012: Washington DC: office

GAMZE:

Extract 10

I: yeah(.)tell me your story what are you doing here where are you coming from and

Gamze: sure(.) well I was born and raised in America(1.0) my family has been living here since the early '70s mmm my family actually my ancestors traced back to Uzbekistan(.) so I am both a turkish american and a turkic american(.) a(#)nd so mmm my grandparents they(.) they migrated from uzbekistan to turkey because mmm although they had a lot of different

options toward where they could migrate they actually migrated to saudi arabia(.) but then decided that they would feel more comfortable raising their children in another turkic county(1.0) so(#)me (,) and so they emigrated there and that's when both my grand(.) both side of my family mmm my father he grow up i(#)n(.) how is it called (,)he grow up in(.) he was born in turkey and was raised there whereas my mother she was born in saudi arabia but she was raised in turkey(.) I think she must have moved there when she was five or six years old(.) and so my family mmm I have been very fortunate because mmm my mother side especially has mmm is very very patriotic(.) a(#)nd I would say that that's probably largely due to the communist invasion mmm (2.0) a(.) and so my(.) and so(#) my(#) grandparents have installed(.) a great love of turkic and turkish culture within(.) in(.) to BOTH MY PARENTS(.) but particularly my mom side mmm and so(#) (1.0) and so my family has worked(.)even though they migrated here in the seventies(.) they have worked very very hard to preserve our culture(.) a(#)nd luckily you know they transmitted a lot of those values to me too and so(#) (,)having grown up in america I mean I was still able to KEEP a lot of my own values(.) and so for that I'm really really grateful

1/20/2012, Washington DC: Phone

Extract 11

I: Can you make me some(.) some examples of those values or things that you parents//

G: Certainly(.)well for example let's see(.) I've been able to speak our own language at home(.) this is something that unfortunately seems to be a LUXURY(.) nowadays(.) not every Turkish mmm family speaks Turkish at home(.) but locally I'm also able to speak both UZBEK AND TURKISH

I: wow

G: mmm a(#)nd(.) I mean(.) going out of the Turkish community is not something that does not happen very often other immigrant families EITHER mmm a lot of families you know(.) they stick to the country(.) that they move to mmm and they get assimilated to their culture so...

1/20/2012, Washington DC: Phone

Extract 12

G:...*some Turks* might especially look at the rules as being very rigid o(#)r(.) you know(.) OPPRESSIVE but that was *never the case for me* and not the case for millions of others(.) a(#)nd here there's a last mmm wonderful mmm aspect that I THINK *a lot of secular turks* are missing now on(.) and I personally think they shouldn't(.) and this is that *being a practicing Muslim*(,) has been and has enabled me to be better and into the Muslim community here in the US(.) a(#)nd in general(.) and this is something that I think *a lot of secular Turks* the do not really understand(.) is that mmm a lot of mmm *MUSLIMS*(,) *they* feel very very connected to turkey(.)although *they* are critical of something within our culture in terms of *how secular we are* mmm they are very open for TURKS(.) *they* really really enjoy MEETING *them*(,) they are very in some ways they(.) *they* admire so many of *our* traditions (,) and *they* always comment on how rich *our* traditions are and they ALWAYS feel indebted to turks because of the ottoman empire(1.0) and a lot of them have actually well(.)most of central Asian Turks a lot of them(.) some feel indebted to(.) Turks because they became MUSLIM as a result of mmm you know of(#) (,) Central Asian mmm of...ex ex(.) the exposure they had to Islam through the central Asian Turks (1.0) a(#)nd so(#) mmm there are so many reasons why many feels so connected Turkey(1.0) so(#) mmm and they always(.) the number one way mmm the number one reason they feel so connected to Turkey is through Islam(.) a(#)nd I was able to *as Turkic American I'm able to speak to all these muslims* here and I'm able to connect with them on so many levels(.)and it's just such a rewarding experience because(.) you, know *I can get a better Glimpse into the how they view*(,) *the world and in SOME WAY I'm better able to be an ambassador to them mmm regarding my own CULTURE*(,)I'm able to introduce my culture in a better way to them(.) because they are open to learning (1.0)and they get very passionate about learning... (my emphasis)

1/20/2012, Washington DC: Phone

Extract 13

I: A#nd ok(.) if it is not too private(.) may I ask you if you married an American(.) a Turkish guy o(#)r

G:I married a Turkish guy and he was actually of turkasian descent(.) Cherkez

I:o(#)k

G:ha ha(.) so he actually is for your view very interesting(.) he is a case study(.) because *laughter* he mmm also grew up(.) well he grew up in turkey a(#)nd he was also like me exposed to two cultures(.)so well(.) I was exposed to the American culture he was exposed to

the Turkish culture(.) and for him that was the new way of life in that sense(.) for his family and all that(.) but his family assimilated more so than mine ever did a(#)nd(.) I think that(.) obviously because(.) it was Turkey was a Muslim country a(#)nd mmm and turkish culture is FAR more similar to THEIR own culture tha(#)n the American culture is mmm to(.) ours(.) you know my culture(.)that makes sense...

CEM:

Extract 14

I: For you what does it means being Turkish mmm American? I mean would you define yourself Turkish American or just Turkish or maybe a Turk living in America?I do not know

Cem: I don't know(.) like(.)Turkish American would be(#) a person (1.0) like who's (1.0) Americanized in this country like(.) [living] the lifestyle(.) like an American(.) but(.) Turkish BACKGROUND(.)I mean I have friends who were born here(1.0)

TURK LIVING IN AMERICA IS (1.0)A TURKISH PERSON who came here at a certain age(.) *twittering of the parrot in the room* still have the same character(.) and the culture of a TURK(.) that's(#) living in Turkey but living in the STATES

I: ha ha

C: mmm I'm P(#)robably right in between like(.) I wouldn't say I'm(.) Turkish American(.) or a Turk still living in the united states like(.) I live like(.) american(.) but I still have like (1.5) I mean I still have like (1.0)my culture(.) and I try to follow it so(#) (1.0)I would say like it's a combination of both [things]

I: so you think for example Turkish Americans *twittering* are more Americanized?

C: right(.) they are more amamericanized like (2.0) they a(#)re(.) they speak the language(.) just like an American(.) the only thing is like i(#)f the go to Turkey(.) they would go there as a tourist(.) not as a TURK(.) you know(1.5)like the other way(1.0) FOR THEM(1.0) in Turkey is like they would have like to LEARN(.) that's the Turkish American(1.0)

like a TURK living in America is like they know about things(.) they grow up with it but then they learned to be an American

I: ok(.) yes

C: So

I: Can you make me some practical examples(.) for example?

Investigating Contemporary Discourses on Turkish Americanness

C: yeah like my f(##)riend (1.0)*twittering* mmm his name is Ali and like (1.0) he was born here(1.0) and mmm like he didn't go back to Turkey fo(##)r long time (1.0) he basically didn't speak any Turkish until(,) he was like thirteen fourteen(,) then he learned but even now like(1.5) like it's not perfect(,)it' s no just that it's like he likes to celebrate Christmas(,) like all those(,) things like they celebrate in the united states(,) almost how they didn't(,) he doesn't care like about the Turkish Holidays and stuff (,) but now like he does because of of respect(1.5) b(##)ut(1.5) as it's like ME(,) me I (1.5) I still celebrate all the(,) the holidays like the turkish holidays that we have (,)even though I(,) I celebrate the(,) like Christmas and thanksgiving too cause I'm here living(,) I'm *twittering*(,)I'm gonna enjoy(,) [what I'm gonna do] mmm both *twittering*= them

1/17/2012, Washington DC: Adnan's living room

APPENDIX 3

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVELS

In this section I will present a general synopsis of the novels analyzed in this study, proceeding from the earliest to the most recently published one. Their length of the summaries varies according to the complexity of the stories narrated in the books.

SEVEN HOUSES (2002) — ALEV LYTTLE CROUTIER

The novel is a family saga covering the years between 1918 and 1997, spanning the last period of the Ottoman Empire until the political success of AKP in contemporary Turkey. Before the foundation of the Republic, Esma, a young widow, decides to buy a house in Izmir that once belonged to ladies in a harem. Having moved to the city, the woman employs the young Suleyman as teacher for her sons. Some sort of affinity immediately develops between Suleyman and Esma, later to develop into a platonic love affair. Esma's brother, Iskender, however, happens to discover the relationship between the two and forbids Suleyman to enter the house ever again. Esma, thinking that Iskender has killed the teacher, lives through a very sad period but after a while discovers that Suleyman is still alive and is fighting with the liberation troops against the British and the Greeks for the independence of Turkey. One night the two manage to meet again; this time, however, there is a major turn in their relationship and Esma becomes pregnant with Suleyman's daughter. Unmarried, the woman decides to avoid a scandal and after having given birth to a beautiful baby she gives the child, Aida, to her sister Mirhban who brings up the girl as one of her own daughters.

Time passes and the war is finally over but Suleyman, after having heard from a jealous neighbor that Esma got married again, decides to leave for the US, leaving everything behind, without even checking if actually the information he got was correct. Indeed, Esma had not married anyone else, but at this point it was too late for the two to meet again.

After some years, Barsam, one of Esma's two sons, gets a scholarship for moving to Boston and leaves Turkey, while his brother Cadri becomes a poet and marries a young flower seller. The relationship between Esma and Camilla, the wife of Cadri, becomes immediately tense as both the women want the attention of the only man in the house. Esma casts an evil spell against her daughter-in-law who starts having problems procreating. With the help of Gonca,

one of the housemaids, Camilla, however, will finally give birth to Amber and the same night Esma dies while Cadri is away for his new job.

Aida, Esma's secret daughter, becomes the first beauty pageant queen of the country and in many occasions she is suspected to have an affair with Atatürk, but, surprising her whole family, she will end up marrying his first lieutenant. Her uncle Iskender, in particular, seems to have serious problems accepting Aida's marriage. According to the patriarch, the incredible beauty of the girl would have secured her a better husband. After a while Cadri and Camilla visit the family's silk plantation with their daughter Amber, a smart girl that immediately gains Iskender's sympathies and becomes his new favorite after Aida.

With the passing of the years the family goes through a dark period. The silk plantation is burned down and Iskender dies in the fire. Afterwards Cadri starts managing the family affairs but, unfortunately, under the burden of increasing debts, he is obliged to liquidate all their possessions. All the characters, then, to overcome the economic difficulties, move together in a new apartment house in Ankara. There the family lives for one year, but defrauded of their few possessions by a charlatan, they are obliged to sell the building.

At this point, Cadri and Camilla move to the US in order to study labor relations while Amber is sent for one year to the house of her grandmother. Details about Cadri and Camilla's life in the US are not disclosed, while the narration follows Amber's rebellious life. After this, there is a long temporal gap and the narration fastforwards to 1997. Amber has become an architect and has moved to the US, and the story resumes with her trip back to Turkey. Together with her daughter, Amber goes to visit her mother and her aunt Aida, bringing with her the ashes of Suleyman. The two, in fact, have met in the US and after the sudden death of the man, whom she deeply loved, Amber wants to bring him back to Izmir. In the meanwhile Aida gets a facelift in Bursa, but something goes wrong during the surgery and she turns into a sort of monster; this, however, does not prevent a much younger man to fall in love with her.

In the last chapter Amber finally travels to Izmir, finds the old house where her family once lived and impulsively decides to buy it and live there with her daughter. After Aida's death, Amber discovers some ambiguous love letters for her aunt that seem to suggest she actually was once in love with Atatürk.

THE SAINT OF INCIPIENT INSANITIES (2004) — ELIF SHAFAK

The narration covers an indefinite span of time — but no more than a few years — and is mainly set in Boston where Ömer, a young Turkish PhD candidate, has moved for his studies. There he meets his housemates, Abed, a Moroccan pious Muslim, and Piyu, a Spanish Catholic who has a platonic relationship with a Hispanic girl called Alegre. Alegre is bulimic but no one of the characters in the novel ever realizes it; wanting to keep it private, she secretly attends the meetings of a support group for eating disorders. Food, however, has a fundamental role in the life of Alegre also because she passionately loves cooking and her passion actually brings her to accept a cooking job for a party where she meets Debra, a girl attending the same help group for eating disorders. That same evening Alegre also meets Gail, Debra's girlfriend. The girl suffers of bipolar disorder, a serious mental issue that causes sudden mood shifts, bringing people from depression to hypomania very quickly, and during the night she makes another failed suicide attempt. Gail, upon meeting with Alegre, is described as a bold woman, but when she first arrived in Boston her personality was completely different. During the novel, in fact, the girl is shown to develop different personalities and those changes are usually signaled by a name shift such as for instance from Zarpandi to Gail, and from Gail to Debra (like her girlfriend).

After the party, Alegre invites Gail and Debra to her birthday dinner and there the two girls meet Ömer, Piyu and Abed. Considered obnoxious and snotty by the whole group, the couple is not immediately accepted but Debra and Gail in particular will slowly start to spend more time at the house where Ömer, Piyu and Abed live together. In the meanwhile Abed's mother, Zahra, visits her son in Boston and there she decides to sacrifice a goat to get rid of the evil eye persecuting her son. After the departure of the woman Ömer, tired by his promiscuous sexual lifestyle, decides to spend the Sylvester eve at home and to set a new beginning, but after too many beers and too much hashish he falls into an ethyl coma and on the point of almost dying, he is saved by his flat mates. After the episode Ömer starts to look for some sort of spiritual guide that he finds in Gail, with whom, not much later, he also falls in love and marries in an unusual ceremony. After the marriage Ömer becomes worried about Gail's constant mood shifts and decides to move into a new house, thinking that his wife would benefit from the changes. Immediately after the move Gail, however, attempts suicide again but, just as before, she fails, saved by their two neighbors while Ömer is not at home. Despite this event, Gail seems to have finally reached some sort of composure when together with her husband she travels to Turkey to visit her in-laws. In Istanbul, however, on their way back to the airport Gail takes advantage of the traffic on the Bosphorus Bridge and, stepping out of the

taxi, she jumps into the sea, killing herself in precisely 2.7 seconds. Exactly at that same moment Piyu, on the other side of the ocean, discovers that his girlfriend is bulimic. Alegre, caught during one of her night binges, then, runs away from her boyfriend and decides to take shelter in Debra's apartment who in the meanwhile has developed strong feelings for her. Still during the same night Abed, at a local laundry feels sexually attracted by an elder woman who tries to seduce him. His first reaction is to escape, but then he goes back to the laundry, and understands that his home now is more in the US than in Morocco.

THE BASTARD OF ISTANBUL (2007) — ELIF SHAFAK

The novel is set between Istanbul, Boston and Arizona and the narration moves back and forward from the 1910s to recent years. When the book begins it is the 1970s, and Zeliha Kazancı is a rebellious and provocative nineteen-year-old Turkish girl when her brother Mustafa rapes her and she becomes pregnant. After a first attempt to get an abortion, the young woman, despite the difficulties she might encounter as a single young mother, decides to keep the baby and not reveal the identity of the father to anyone. The child Aysa grows up in the same house as her mother and aunts together with her grandmother and her great-grandmother. When Armanoush, Mustafa's step-daughter, arrives in Istanbul Aysa is about twenty. Armanoush is an Armenian American and in the US she divides her life between Arizona, where her possessive mother Rose and her Turkish husband stay, and the house of her father in Boston. Descending from an old Armenian family that survived the killings of the 1915, the girl decides to visit Turkey in order to find the places where her grandmother once used to live. Therefore she secretly contacts the family of Mustafa and goes to Istanbul.

During her trip, Armanoush does not discover much about her family, but talking with Asya and other Turkish people she experiences a sort of a "paradox". While the killing of the Armenians is generally accepted, in fact, no one seems to interpret the events between 1915 and 1923 as genocide. Furthermore, the Turks Armanoush talks to do not seem to feel any continuity with the pre-republic past of the country, and therefore are not willing to admit their responsibility in those events.

When Armanoush's grandmother Shushan suddenly dies, the girl is obliged to confess to her family that she is in Istanbul at Mustafa's family house and Rose immediately flies to Istanbul with her husband. Banu, one of the sisters of Zeliha, thanks to her talent as clairvoyant, has for years already known the truth about Aysa's father and when Mustafa arrives at home she offers him a poisoned bowl of aşure, a Turkish dessert. The man actually suspects something

but he decides to eat the bowl of aşure, accepting the eventuality of being punished for his crime and consequently dies. The crime is not discovered by anyone. Aysa, at the end of the story, finally learns from her mother that Mustafa was her father.

Banu, before the death of her brother, uses her clairvoyant abilities to investigate also the past of Armanoush's grandmother and discovers that the woman was actually related to the Kazancı. Shushan, in fact, was the mother of her own father but after having escaped the prosecutions, she escaped with her brother to America, leaving a young child and her husband in Turkey without any apparent reason.

THE POSSESSED (2010) — ELIF BATUMAN

The Possessed is an autobiographical novel set between the US, Russia, Turkey and Central Asia that narrates the doctoral years of Elif Batuman. The novel begins with a quick overview of Elif's studies: after a period studying linguistics she starts attending Russian classes and immediately develops a strong interest toward Russian literature. In the meanwhile she falls in love with a Hungarian classmate and consequently decides to spend the summer teaching English in a village not too far from Budapest. Back in the US, Elif wants to become a writer and applies for an artists' colony in Cape Cod where she is offered a fellowship. After a visit to the colony, however, she decides to refuse the grant and, instead, accepts a position as doctoral student in comparative literature at Stanford University. So she moves to California together with her new boyfriend Eric and starts attending classes and seminars. After the first semester Elif decides to take a break and starts working on a novel, but after fifteen months, broke and with no health insurance, she goes back again to Stanford. Before summer holidays Elif sends various applications among which one for a seasonal job in Russia with *Let's go* — a student travel guide — and another for a grant to study in Moscow. *Let's go* offers her, instead of a post in Russia, the same job in Turkey, so Elif stays for two weeks in Moscow and afterwards flies to Turkey where she spends her summer travelling around the country. Knowing she is alone, her family, however, is quite worried and her aunt, who is an officer in the Turkish national intelligence, manages to keep her under control with the help of various colleagues who follow Elif from place to place. Back in Stanford, Elif gets another scholarship for spending one semester in Moscow; however, when she discovers she is supposed to start teaching Russian, she — scared by the possibility of making mistakes in public — decides, instead, to go to Samarkand and learn Uzbek.

After the trip, the protagonist's relationship with Eric comes to an end probably also as a consequence of Elif's ambiguous friendship with Matej, an extremely charismatic philosophy major from Croatia. The life of the young woman goes on between fieldwork periods and conferences. In the meanwhile Elif and Matej stop talking to each other and he completely disappears from the protagonist's life. Elif, after a long period, finds out that Matej decided to drop his studies and took the vows as a member of the Carmelites.

EPILOGUE

I cannot exactly say when it happened, but well before I learned by heart the first stanzas of the Divine Comedy I already knew I wanted to do a PhD: in sciences or perhaps in history, but for sure not in English. I didn't like foreign languages and their foreign sounds at all! The subject of my hypothetical PhD dissertation however at the time didn't matter much, I just desperately wanted to do it. I remember that once at the Catholic school one of the sisters took me apart and told me to invest in my education as I wasn't pretty enough to get a good husband. She did not like me much but she was speaking from the heart. That was a sort of superior will for all the quite too chubby girls...especially for the ones with orthopedic shoes. However, whatever the reason was, five years ago, when I finished my masters at "L'Orientale" I still desperately wanted to read and write more about complicated issues I could not even imagine at the time. I still have a vivid picture of that period: it was a hot summer, with temperature over 35 degrees Celsius, and I was sitting in my mother's house, two kilometers from the sea and with no air conditioning, thinking about something interesting to study in depth. Some call it "no rewarded efforts", others boldness, but Italian students know it well: this is the standard procedure for gaining admission into any Humanities Department: no summer fun until you finish your project! The selection process is divided into three parts and one of them is writing a project proposal that should be submitted by the end of August. I got my degree at the end of May and therefore didn't have much time, and to tell the truth I also didn't have many ideas at the very beginning. I just had vague feelings about what I liked and disliked. Definitely I didn't consider myself as one of those people who can work in dark archives trying to jealously hide their translations of dusty Ottoman manuscripts, and Islamic law — or Islamic economics — was also not for me. Geopolitics, despite the fact that a project about GAP would have easily brought me a scholarship, was also out of the list. The variety of disciplines I studied during my master's and bachelor's then didn't help. When I finished my studies, like the majority of my colleagues I could not define myself as anything other than a Turkologist and this is quite old fashioned. The fact that MS Word suggests that I change it to "Urologist" can give an idea of how unpopular this label might be nowadays. We are those who know about the Turks but after the degree, finding the department that can accommodate us is a big challenge. Some jumped

in fields such as numismatic or submarine archeology, but being extravagant was not one of my priorities that summer.

I've always been interested in Sufism and for a while I considered preparing a project on popular confraternities such as the *Nurcu* or the *Naqshibandi*. Hearing that researchers usually had some practical difficulties in gathering their data persuaded me to abandon the idea. However, I still had migrations. For my master's degree I wrote a dissertation about the literary and cinematographic representation of the Turkish squatter houses — what is technically called *gecekondu* — and I was still interested in this topic, just I was tired of reading painful stories of poverty at the end of which someone was always killed, abused or hopelessly insane. If I desperately wanted to do a PhD I was also desperately in need of some sparkle: not necessarily in Gatsby's style but at least I was in search of a less raw realism. I rapidly discarded even this idea: no more *gecekondu* for me even if I knew it would have been faster to prepare a project on a topic I was already familiar with. It is commonsense and that is also what the majority of the PhD candidates do. However it was out of the question; I was going to look for something I wouldn't have regretted to study for the next three or four — well actually five — years.

I liked the idea of using literature as a starting point for reflecting on society: it partially was what I tried to do in my master's thesis and the work of one of my professors certainly had a huge influence on my final decision. For four years — not five just because as a freshman I studied Arabic — a study based upon the analysis of different literary artifacts about changing gender roles within Turkish patriarchal society has been my bible and at that point I was ready to apply its teaching. Or that was at least what I thought. How aesthetic texts could be used to make sense of society was still a celestial mystery. After years, for us Turkologists of Southern Italy, this peculiar way of looking at literature was probably very "natural": being busy with the complexities of Turkish gerunds we never suspected this was the outcome of a theoretical "indoctrination" carried on by the Neapolitan school of Turkish studies. To put it in this way, of course, it looks more like a complot theory than the program of bachelor and master courses, but, as a matter of fact, this was what the most influential professor of our "area studies" was working on and consequently her publications influenced the teachings of many other Turkish professors at that university as well as outside it.

It is kind of funny now, but the point is that that summer, working with literature for understanding society was one of the few certainties I had. At the same time, however, in

those few weeks I also started to become suspicious. Was it really possible to investigate society, culture and identities just by analyzing their narratives? Of course it was my professors' approach but what about "traditional" sociological studies? I thought that it would have been definitely challenging to combine such different approaches and I was really curious about the outcome. What I did, then, was quite different, but this was how it all started.

At the beginning of July, migrants were still in my mind. People sometimes ask if I myself come from a family of migrants, maybe of Turkish migrants, but the only thing I remember now is that my great grandmother had an affair, and a daughter, from a Greek student of dentistry, but this is not exactly the same thing. I guess sometimes there is no reason why we are interested in something. We just find it intriguing in some mysterious way. However, going back to that summer, at the time I knew there were a lot of Turks in Germany. I even wanted to write my master thesis on this topic, but then I refused to go to Berlin for Erasmus and I picked up a teaching job in Dublin that brought me kilometers away from Kreuzberg and from my original project. Maybe it was the right time to brush up on it. Of course I couldn't speak any German except some random words I learned from some friends but it was not too late for learning a new language. Full of enthusiasm, I started reading papers about Turkish migration to Germany. After a few days, however, I was already discomforted. In the last fifty years the massive migration of Turkish guest workers to Europe, especially to Germany and the Netherlands in particular, has attracted the interest of several scholars and those same scholars have produced an incredibly rich literature on the topic. Starting from zero, it was really difficult to get a precise idea of what still needed to be investigated and what, on the other hand, was over-studied. I knew research projects do not necessarily have to enter unexplored lands, but I also was of the idea that an interesting piece of research couldn't go in the direction of many others. I was just looking for something that was not so much studied.

It was about the 20th of July when my mother came home with this famous and controversial book that was advertised in almost every bookshop in her bag. *The Bastard of Istanbul*: of course I had heard about it already, especially for the big scandal the author was involved in together with the Nobel Prize laureate Orhan Pamuk. They had been accused of offending Turkishness in their novels and they were both on trial. Shafak's book, however, was far too expensive for a student; when it came out I immediately thought I would have waited for the paperback version. That summer, nevertheless, it was there on my desk: an unequivocally

oriental hard cover version, nicely wrapped in blue paper with a yellow ribbon in the middle. Now, some would call it destiny, others luck; whatever name you give it, in my hands I was holding what has brought me today to write a dissertation about Turkish Americans. On the back flap there was a short biography of the author. I was immediately attracted by the names of the many places Shafak lived in: France, Spain, Germany. At the time the Italian version of the novel was printed, the author was living between Turkey and the US, where she was working as a university professor. Quite unusual, I thought. Were there a lot of Turks in the US or was Shafak an isolated case? Moreover, were there also other Turkish authors writing for an English speaking audience in the States? I started gathering information and it is superfluous to say now that I immediately found the topic extremely interesting. At first I've been impressed by the scarcity of studies on Turkish Americans; Turkish migration to the US is a phenomenon that has been going on since the end of the 19th century but, unlike the European case, it has passed almost unnoticed throughout the decades. In fact Turkish Migration to America has not been given a lot of attention from academia until very recent years, when the phenomenon has started to capture the attention of a number of Turkish and American scholars. The situation that emerges from these, however, is of great interest in view of its deviation from the standard picture. In fact Turkish emigration to the US has been really low compared to that to Europe and has been characterized by the migration of a majority of intellectuals and professionals.

At that point I had all I wanted. Furthermore, I didn't know but Sufism would have definitely entered my project as a transversal topic. I wrote a first draft of what would have become my research project and I sent it to different universities, in and outside Italy, keeping my fingers crossed for good news. At this point of the story there is no need to go further explaining how and why a few months after I arrived at Tilburg University. What I would rather discuss is how my project developed and changed during these years, leading to the volume that today is my dissertation.

When I started this project I just had a vague idea of what the outcome of my research would be. I knew I was going to investigate Turkish American identity through literature and "more traditional" sociological tools but that was a very general project. Without any doubt I needed to focus and better define my research questions as well as my object of study. First of all: were Turkish Americans as a general category the object of my study, or was I focusing just on what at the time I called the *Turkish American intellectual élite*? But especially: what was I exactly looking for? Cultural identity? Cultural adaptation? Cultural adaptation strategies

maybe? Cultural narratives? And then: how was I precisely going to get and to analyze my data? How could I define my approach? I don't know if it is always like that, but I went through a painful and long process of wrecking my brain. All I knew vanished together with the warm days of that summer and I found myself in a long and rainy never-ending winter. I had to rebuild everything piece by piece.

Luckily enough for my reader it is not my intention to bore her — or him — with further details about my existential central European crisis. I will not enumerate all the disastrous stages this research project went through nor will I complain for the rain, the almost complete absence of any sun or the embarrassing paleness that my face has conquered today. I also had wonderful moments of enthusiasm and pure happiness that I'll never forget.

SUMMARY

WHO IS TURKISH AMERICAN?

INVESTIGATING CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES ABOUT TURKISH AMERICANNESS

The main motivation for this research is that within the field of Turkish American studies, identity issues have been almost completely uninvestigated. The few works exploring the topic, as a consequence of the theoretical and methodological approach upon which they rely, have substantially failed to describe the complexity that today characterizes the Turkish American experience. Previous studies have mainly either explored Turkish migration to the US from a historical perspective, focused on the degree of cultural adaptation of diverse groups of migrants, or pointed at the differences between first- and second-generation Turkish Americans. Although every study about Turkish Americans necessarily implies a definition of “Turkish Americanness”, quite singularly, this label has not been discussed or problematized to show how it might acquire different meanings according to the context within which it is defined.

The greatest problem I see with most of the existing research within the Turkish American context is that they mainly rely on a priori definitions of “Turkish Americanness” which prevents the researcher from showing and understanding the heterogeneity of the Turkish American experience. In view of this situation, my study seeks to bring a new perspective into this area of studies by providing an analysis of different discourses about Turkish Americanness circulating in private as well as in public contexts.

My aim was to answer a very broad question: “*Who is Turkish American?*” Or, more specifically: “*What are the discourses through which Turkish American identities are built in contemporary American society?*” To answer these questions, rather than focusing on specific identity “parameters” — such as class, gender, education, religion, language, migration pattern, age, etc. — I decided to investigate how Turkish Americanness is created within different contexts as a more general experience. To capture the complexity of this phenomenon, given especially the lack of previous studies on discourses about Turkish Americanness, the choice of reducing my analysis to just one or a few parameters would have limited my understanding of Turkish American identities. Furthermore, as it also emerges

from my analysis, separating certain identity parameters would have been challenging as they often indissolubly intersect with each other, influencing the specific shape that Turkish Americanness takes in each context. It can be concluded that certain parameters had a major visibility; this, however, should be considered a consequence of different factors such as the discourses observed, the specific position within different contexts of actors issuing these discourses, my own position as a researcher, and the circumstances under which the data have been collected and analyzed.

The book investigates different discourses about Turkish American identities from a multimodal perspective and is mainly based on a theoretical and hermeneutical approach deriving from critical discourse analysis and ethnography. The work of Stuart Hall also played a significant role in defining the way identities and culture are conceived within this study, and *Uses of Literature* by Rita Felski (2008) had a huge influence in shaping my understanding of literary artifacts as regards their relation to identities. The use of diverse types of data — websites, interviews and novels — allowed me to draw a more complex picture of the Turkish American situation, pointing at different meanings that “being Turkish American” might have today. Concretely, my data consisted of contemporary novels (*Seven Houses* by Alev Lytle Croutier, *The Possessed* by Elif Batuman, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* and *The Bastard of Istanbul* by Elif Shafak), the websites of two Turkish American organizations (the *Assembly of Turkish American Associations* and the *Turkish American Islamic Institute*), and fieldnotes and interviews I collected during fieldwork in Washington DC in January 2012 and, later, in December 2013/January 2014.

This combination of different types of data proved to be very fruitful for identifying and analyzing the heterogeneous variety of discourses about Turkish Americanness today, and how those discourses change according to the actors involved and the specific micro and macro context within which they take place. It is clear, therefore, that it is not possible to refer to a monolithic, never-changing and absolute Turkish Americanness, but rather Turkish Americanness can be regarded as continuously constructed, as a becoming, rather than a being, that needs to be constantly monitored and re-discussed.

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